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**COMMODIFICATION AND CRIME:
A COMPARISON OF LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF
NEW YORK AND SHANGHAI SINCE THE 1980s**

JIAYING CAI

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Abstract

This dissertation provides a close textual analysis of a selective number of New York and Shanghai novels published since the 1980s. It focuses on the formal and thematic features of these novels through comparative analyses of the themes of commodification and crime. Part I draws on the work of Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, Candace Bushnell, Wei Hui and Wang Anyi. It examines how commodification has become not just a feature of global fiction but how writers are drawn to a narrative of excess in their representations of it. Wei Hui's "body writing" shares the same materialistic emphasis as New York "Brat Pack" writing but in their criticism of material excess, their approaches are different. The markets in which these writers and their novels circulate also show how commodification can take control of their reception and lead to different interpretations and misinterpretations. Part II of the dissertation draws on the work of Qiu Xiaolong and Linda Fairstein. Through a close analysis of the representation of time and space, this part argues that both authors' deployment of time and space serves as a strategy to reveal the different social contexts that form the latent causes of individual crimes. By introducing a comparative analysis, this dissertation demonstrates that the shared themes of commodification and crime need to be contextualized within the two cities in order to understand the varied manifestations of the ongoing process of urbanization and its consequences for the literatures and cultures of New York and Shanghai.

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I still remember the first “supervision” I had with Professor Douglas Tallack in the Trent Café, University of Nottingham. It was a sunny September afternoon. He opened a copy of *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney and began to show me how to read a novel properly and professionally. I remember how he masterfully conducted a detailed textual analysis of the opening section of the novel in such an eloquent manner that for a while I believed reading and interpreting texts would not be as difficult as it had at first seemed. Looking back, I have to confess that I vastly underestimated the challenges entailed in reading and writing for a PhD student at that time.

Over the next four years, I overcame linguistic and cultural barriers to complete my PhD study away from home in the United Kingdom. I know that I could have never finished my dissertation without the help of many people.

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Introduction: Urbanization and the Urban Fiction of New York and Shanghai

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the representation of urbanization in novels about New York and Shanghai published since the 1980s. The dissertation aims to examine whether the influences of urbanization on the contemporary literature of these two cities can be understood in order to offer an alternative means, other than sociological or historical studies, with which to explain this global trend. By comparing the themes, forms, characters, and styles in novels about the two cities, this dissertation attempts to reveal the similarities and differences between them while positioning these interpretations within the disparate social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the two cities. The texts to be investigated in this dissertation include a select number of novels published since 1984 which use New York or Shanghai as an essential setting, or a main character.¹ They include Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) and *Story of My Life* (1988), Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991) and Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1996), Linda Fairstein's *Likely to Die* (1997) and *Cold Hit* (1999), Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (1999) and *Marrying Buddha* (2005), Wang Anyi's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (1996), Qiu Xiaolong's *When Red is Black* (2004) and *Red Mandarin Dress* (2008).²

¹ I am borrowing this term from Linda Fairstein's description of the role of New York in her video on *Hell Gate* (2010) to indicate that one important criterion for the urban texts selected in this dissertation is that New York or Shanghai must have an explicit presence in the novels. Instead of using them merely as a backdrop or referring to them in passing, these novels must associate their stories or characters closely with the cities. See Fairstein, video on *Hell Gate*.

² Unlike English names, the Chinese name is formed by placing the surname first, followed by

The idea of making such a comparative analysis of recent literary representations of New York and Shanghai arises at a time when China's development has begun to eclipse the hegemony of the developed world, in which the United States of America has held a leading role for roughly a century. Since its inception in 1978, China's Reform and Opening-up Policy has initiated a far-reaching process of urbanization, the speed and scale of which is unprecedented.³ With over 400 million people moving to cities from rural areas since 1980, China had more than 166 cities with populations of over a million in 2008, while the US only had nine such cities in the same year (Liauw 10). Within the last thirty years, China has arguably achieved a scale of urbanization that has taken most developed countries more than a century to accomplish.

The changes happening in developing countries such as China are making our world increasingly urbanized. We are living in what David Thorns believes to be "an urban millennium" (1). Thorns' categorization describes not only those developed countries that are entering a post-industrial phase, in which cities have transformed their roles from manufacturers to service providers and shown features that can be summarized as "postmodern", a concept famously deployed by Fredric Jameson to articulate what he calls "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism", or simply put, multinational capitalism (46). Thorns' categorization also describes the large number of

the first name and middle name. This dissertation retains the Chinese style of naming and addresses all Chinese names in the order of "surname," "first name" and "middle name." In "Works Cited", the author of the dissertation follows the MLA style sheet by putting surname first, followed by a comma to distinguish it from the first name and middle name.

³ The Reform and Opening-up Policy refers to a series of economic policies following the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP (Chinese Communist Party) Congress in 1978. In that meeting, the leadership adopted economic reform policies known as the Four Modernizations. These tenets aimed at expanding rural income and incentives, encouraging autonomous entrepreneurial experiments, reducing central planning, and establishing direct foreign investment in the People's Republic of China.

developing countries which are undergoing a massive process of urbanization. The cities in developing countries are thus increasingly embracing both old and new problems—that is to say, both those modern issues that have been experienced by developed economies during their periods of industrialization, as well as the uniquely postmodern problems that are new to post-industrial cities, too. According to the World Bank (1996) estimates, by 2025 “eighty-eight per cent of the world’s total population will be located in rapidly expanding urban areas and ninety per cent of that urban expansion will be absorbed by the developing world” (qtd. in Thorns 1).

Given these circumstances, it becomes imperative to bring the case of China’s urbanization into perspective, particularly since efforts are being made to understand the impact of global urbanization in the past three decades (1980-2010). This dissertation analyzes literary representations of New York and Shanghai as two prototypes of a distinctively contemporary urban literature in order to facilitate an understanding of literary responses to global urbanization; in the sense that New York symbolizes the pinnacle of capitalist (post)modern cities in developed countries, while Shanghai represents the fastest-growing (post)modern city in China—and perhaps the entire developing world.

At a cursory glance, there are similarities between the two cities that seem to suggest a good basis for comparison. Both were colonial and immigrant cities by definition. Both have been, and continue to be, important port cities that have evolved into financial centres of regional and global importance. Both cities are unique in their ethnic makeups, in the sense that each has a considerable migrant population which makes them atypical within their respective country. New York, for instance, is an extremely culturally

diversified city. As Thomas Bender argues, “the outlook associated with New York’s cosmopolitan experience has been unable to establish itself as an American standard.” (23) Bender offers a problematic interpretation of New York’s Americanness. He admits that there is “a ring of truth” in seeing “New York as being different, something other than America” (23). Similarly, Shanghai—which played host to a large number of foreign expatriates in its International Settlement⁴ in the late nineteenth century and maintains a vibrant immigrant population into the 21st century—has a unique *Haipai* cultural tradition that makes it vastly different from other inland Chinese cities.⁵

Similarities between the two cities can also easily be detected from their respective appearances. In terms of architectural styles, both cities boast a quintessentially modern, metropolitan spectacle of skyscrapers: any picture of the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building or the World Trade Center (before 9/11), for instance, immediately reveals Manhattan to be a synecdoche for New York. Likewise, any picture of the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, the Jin Mao Tower, and now the Shanghai World Financial Centre, makes *Lujiazui* (of Pudong District)⁶ a metonym for Shanghai.

⁴ The International Settlement was effectively established in 1844. It was the name given to the combined British and American foreign concessions in Shanghai and was located to the south of the Su Zhou Creek. Its governing body was the Shanghai Municipal Council.

⁵ Frequently cited as functioning in opposition to *Jingpai* culture (Beijing local culture), *Haipai* culture, or Shanghai-school culture, is a term used to describe Shanghai’s local culture, which in its broadest sense, can be translated as “tolerance, adaptability, popularity and modernity”. See Yatsko 138 and Guo.

⁶ Pudong District, or Pudong New Area is one of the seventeen districts of Shanghai. It is located on the east side of the Huangpu River. It has an area of 522.8 km² and a population of approximately 1.5 million people. It used to be a piece of farm land until the government turned it into a Special Economic Zone in 1992. Since then, the district has become the fastest growing region of Shanghai. *Lujiazui*, or *Lujiazui* Finance and Trade Zone, is an important central business zone of Pudong, and now of Shanghai. It comprises Shanghai’s tallest buildings such as the Oriental TV Tower, Jinmao Tower, and the International Financial Centre, and reflects the rapid economic development in both Shanghai and China. See Arkaraprasertkul 30-48.

However, these two cities are underlined by greater and more significant differences. New York was built on a democratic political system, nurtured at a consistent pace of development by a relatively peaceful social and political environment. It has been the greatest capitalist city for almost a century in terms of its political, financial and cultural influence. In contrast, Shanghai's potential to be a great city has long been repressed and repeatedly disrupted. In the 1930s, the city was still recognized as the "Paris of the East" (Meng vii), claiming itself to be as influential as Paris, New York, London and Tokyo. But it soon lost its metropolitan glamour due to the Japanese invasion in World War II and subsequent domestic political turmoil. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Shanghai's economy was stagnant under the planned economy; disrupted by the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977)⁷ and ignored by Beijing when the open-door policy was implemented in 1978.⁸ At its worst, Shanghai was reduced to an industrial base for the country.⁹ It was not until 1992 that the city began to benefit from the central government's preferential policies, after Deng Xiaoping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), visited Shanghai in his famous "Southern Tour"¹⁰ and showed vigorous support for opening up the

⁷ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a period of chaos and massive persecution in China and was launched by Mao Zedong and his followers on May 16, 1966. It was officially a revolutionary class campaign to rid China of its "liberal bourgeois" elements by mobilizing the thoughts and actions of China's youth. Although Mao himself officially declared the Cultural Revolution to have ended in 1969, the term is still widely used today to include the power struggles and political instability between 1969 and the arrest of the Gang of Four, as well as the death of Mao, in 1976.

⁸ Shanghai was not among the first group of Chinese cities to be opened up following the country's Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978. The Chinese government designated four cities to be the first group of special economic zones in China in 1980, including Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou in Guangdong Province and Xiamen in Fujian Province.

⁹ See Yatsko 20-33.

¹⁰ The Southern Tour refers to the tour Deng Xiaoping made between 17 January and 20 February 1992, to a few Pearl River Delta cities and towns: Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Shunde in the southern coastal area of China, and the city of Shanghai. The main purpose of his tour was to gain support for his economic reform program, which was under attack by his

city's Pudong area—the east side of Shanghai's Huangpu River—as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ).¹¹ As a result, Pudong quickly took the lead in the major economic transition that has entirely changed the outlook of both Shanghai and of China in subsequent decades.

From these necessarily selective descriptions of the histories of New York and Shanghai, it is evident that there is an apparent time-lag between them in terms of their respective levels of urbanization. New York today is largely a post-industrial city with explicit features of postmodernity in its social, cultural and architectural domains. Meanwhile, although showing features of postmodernity in its urban architecture (such as the rather futuristic-looking Oriental Pearl TV Tower and Shanghai Museum), Shanghai is still undergoing social transformations of a modern nature: not only in its physical domain (such as extending its underground train networks—a process that was completed decades ago in most major capitalist cities), but especially in its cultural and political domains. Zhang Xudong deliberately uses a different terminology of “postsocialism” to describe the problematic conditions in modern China, and particularly in Shanghai. In his view, China's “modernness increasingly depends on its...postmodernity” (9). He believes such a term “highlights the national historical lineage, casting into relief the global shift from modernity to postmodernity” (9). “Postmodernity”, for him, conceptualizes the situation in most developed Western countries but is insufficient to describe China's unique mode of development. With the term “postsocialism”, Zhang differentiates different modes of modernization and

opponents in the Communist Party after the events at Tiananmen Square. See Zhao.

¹¹ A Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a geographical region designated by the Chinese government as a free-market zone to create jobs and increase revenues by attracting foreign investments with favourable tax policies.

postmodernization within China's specific national context. It throws light on the many problematic aspects of the country's market economy, which remains governed by a socialist ideology and political regime. In this context, "postsocialism" becomes a pertinent and useful term to describe and analyze the social context of Shanghai, and to interpret Shanghai literature written in the past three decades.

However, the approach I take in this PhD dissertation is a literary critical one. There are three reasons for such a choice. Firstly, the novel, as a literary genre, can often capture the mood of a society, its tendencies and impact upon individuals, through its representation of life. Often a collage of lived experience as well as personal and imaginative perceptions of life, the novel provides an alternative means with which to examine society, distinct from factual or historical accounts. Unlike short fiction, drama or poetry, the novel can offer a dense and sustained portrayal of the experience of everyday life using literary forms and themes that are conducive to representing reality. Literary criticism, in this instance, uses the genre to explore these general features of society through the study of the novel's themes, forms and characters. Secondly, the interest of literary critics in form, style, narrative, genre and the circulation of the novel helps them to perceive the impact and consequences of social changes on literary production. This reveals literary criticism to be an equally important and similarly rigorous means of acquiring knowledge of a particular society, in comparison with other social science disciplines. At its best, criticism can help us appreciate how language and form themselves give insights into lived experience. For example, Jay McInerney's jarring use of the second-person narrative in *Bright Lights, Big City* seems

quite appropriate to the dislocated, life-in-the-present existence of his main character. Thirdly, given an increasing focus on the significance of signs and representations by postmodern theorists who argue that there has been a breakdown of the distinction between the real and the imagined, it is important to understand how literary representations construct meaning, contribute to knowledge formation, and change our perception of the world through literary “signs”.¹² In order to unpack the relationship between the signifier and the signified, therefore, it becomes essential to grasp the nature of the relationship between reality and representation. And postmodern fiction, as Linda Hutcheon has suggested, is “a preferential forum for discussion of the postmodern” (*A Poetics* 38).

Through a critical analysis of urban literature, this dissertation contributes to contemporary literary criticism in three distinct ways. Firstly, this dissertation is one of the first studies to establish a comparison of the literary representations of New York and Shanghai. Comparatists in the contemporary period have recently shifted their focus from a Euro-centric and American-centric perspective, and in light of this shift my comparison between the literary representations of an American and an East Asian metropolis—a comparison which spans two very different cultures and political systems—offers a meaningful contribution to comparative literary studies and urban studies. It also follows the recent direction which David Harvey has suggested for comparative urban research: “urbanism, as a general phenomenon should not be viewed as the history of particular cities, but as the history of a system of cities within, between and around which the surplus circulates” (qtd. in

¹² The breakdown of the distinction between the real and the imagined is a key idea examined by postmodern theorists. Jean Baudrillard, for one, has articulated this idea throughout his work. See Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*.

Walton 308). In this sense, in order to understand the impact of urbanization on humanity we should treat it in a global context, instead of privileging the interpretation of some cities over others. At a time when the regions that construct our global village become ever more closely knitted together and the world appears increasingly multi-polar, cross-cultural understanding has never been as crucial as it is today. It is a desired goal of this dissertation to bridge the understanding of two different cultures through an examination of their literary texts that is structured by shared themes. My own position as an academic researcher who straddles both the English and Chinese languages therefore places me in an advantageous position to conduct such a pioneering and exploratory comparison of these two exciting and major cities.

Secondly, this dissertation is also a contribution to knowledge. It provides a philosophical interpretation of urbanization through an intent focus on its literary representations. This literary study thus complements sociological and cultural studies of the impact of urbanization, forming an indispensable investigative component in furthering our understanding of the dominant social, political and cultural changes taking place across the world today.

Last but not least, this study is the first project systematically to discuss and compare authors such as Linda Fairstein and Qiu Xiaolong, who, for me, have used their urban knowledge successfully to enrich the crime fiction genre. Although it is difficult to judge what exact reasons contribute to the lack of scholarly attention given to these two authors thus far, there are a few speculations that attempt to answer this question tentatively. One speculation is that the genre of detective fiction has long been a popular one and there has

been fierce competition among genre writers to attain popularity and critical acclaim. For Qiu and Fairstein, writing crime fiction has not been their full-time profession until fairly recently: a fact which has arguably undermined their involvement in the marketization of their books. Hence, this reduces their chances to advocate or receive critical attention. In Qiu's case, his transnational identity has the effect of confining his readership and critics to a smaller group of people than the average American writer enjoys in America. His own ethnic identity also makes him less likely to be at the forefront of critical attention in the country. This dissertation, however, provides one of the first critical analyses of the novels written by such non-canonical writers and aims to offer a useful critical framework through which to understand the novels and the cities represented by Fairstein and Qiu.

In making a comparison of the themes, forms, characters, styles, genres, and marketization processes of novels which represent New York and Shanghai, this dissertation pays close attention to the relationship between text and context. It endeavours to answer the following questions through close textual analysis. What makes these novels comparable to each other? How do the themes, forms and characters in these New York and Shanghai novels compare to, and differ from, one another? Do the similarities between themes, forms and characters in them indicate any similarities in the social, historical and political changes that have affected both cities? How do the differences between these literary strategies reflect the social, cultural, political, and ideological differences between New York and Shanghai? What is the role of particular literary genres, such as the genre of detective fiction, in indicating

the similarities and differences between these two cities and their literary histories?

In order to answer these questions, this Introduction has its own role to fulfil. Apart from explaining the purpose of the dissertation as above, this Introduction also offers a brief overview of theories of urbanization. The purpose of this critical survey is to highlight useful theoretical concepts and ideas that can help organize my reading of these novels and lead to meaningful analyses and comparisons. This will be explained in the section on “Methodology”, which demonstrates the theoretical frameworks that organize the discussion of my chosen novels. As the focus of the dissertation is the relationship between literature and the city, this Introduction also gives a brief overview of the literary histories of the two cities in the past three decades and explains the reason for choosing certain novels over others. Finally, it demonstrates the structure of the whole dissertation.

Theorizing the Urban

Academic concern with the nature and experience of urban life has invariably developed in tandem with industrialisation and capitalism. Among the intellectual founders of sociology, Karl Marx’s classic analysis of capital, class and surplus value in *Capital* (1867), which primarily deals with capitalism, can be regarded as an important theoretical response to the condition of urban life in the late nineteenth century.¹³ His colleague and close friend, Friedrich Engels, dealt with urban life more directly in his *The Condition of the Working*

¹³ Although John Walton argues that “Marx did not give systematic attention” to urbanisation, Marx’s discussion of capital, production, and commodification has unconsciously endorsed the fact that the city is the centre of capitalist economic activities. See Walton 303.

Class in England (1844) and his journal articles entitled “The Housing Question” (1872), which became an eponymous book. In both texts, Engels gives a detailed account of life in the urban slums in major European countries in the mid and late nineteenth century. Max Weber, on the other hand, systematically discussed modern cities on a sociological, economic and administrative level in his posthumous work *The City* (1921), which is perceptibly influenced by Ferdinand Tönnies and Georg Simmel. These works provided fertile soil for later sociologists to investigate the city at a structural level.

However, the first intellectual to discuss the relationship between the city and its people was Simmel. His “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) is a seminal work that attentively investigates the impact of urbanisation on the individual. Unlike Marx and Weber, who attempted to identify the structural features of capitalism and urbanism, Simmel’s work summarizes the overarching characteristics of urban life and metropolitan “individuality” (“The Metropolis” 12). In this article, Simmel examines the relationship between the individual and urban consumer society. This analysis has multiple implications, particularly into imaginative representations of city life, as a result of its revelation of the mutually constitutive relationship between the urban environment and the urban individual. In this way, Simmel established an early model for the Chicago School urban ecologists, who believed that human behaviour is determined by social environment instead of biological heritage. Meanwhile, Simmel’s idea that the urban personality engages with the city not only as a place of production, but of consumption, was supported and further developed by later social and cultural theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Mike

Featherstone, and David Thorns.¹⁴ For this particular dissertation, the urban theories advanced by Simmel and the Chicago School provide a basic framework for me to discuss the relationship between the city and the individual in my analysis of particular urban literary texts.

With the restructuring of economies in modern cities and the emergence of a series of urban crises including economic depression and urban crime, the 1970s witnessed a boom of scholarship on urban studies in the Western world, particularly within the fields of urban planning, social science, and cultural studies. Most prominently, urban sociology established itself as a subdiscipline that focused intently on issues arising from modern cities. Theorists turned to the model established by earlier Chicago School's researchers such as Louis Wirth, who believed diversity and heterogeneity to be the overarching characteristics of the city. Wirth's assertion opened up an academic investigation of urban social life and inspired innovative sociological research model. His followers championed detailed ethnographic studies of urban life by using quantitative methodologies—a pioneering step in urban sociology at that time. Not satisfied with the discovery of urban differences by Chicago School researchers, however, Marxist and Weberian theorists from the 1970s and beyond attempted to disclose the power and class relations underpinning social inequalities. The French Marxist, Manuel Castells, for example, believed that “the urban question [...] is an ideological question” through his study of urban conflicts and movements (429). Such a Marxist approach was broadened by other urban researchers such as Harvey and Sharon Zukin. Harvey's interest

¹⁴ These theorists all offer the idea that rather than their patterns of production, people's consumption patterns have increasingly become a defining characteristic of urban life toward the end of the twentieth century. See Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, Featherstone and Thorns.

in geography has allowed him to contemplate urban divisions in the context of globalization. He proposes to investigate urban geography in a historical context in order to understand the current global capitalist system (*Space* 108). And “urbanism” he argues, “is at least partly moulded out of basic principles of spatial organization” (*Social Justice* 307). Zukin, on the other hand, believes that the debates and theoretical insights associated with postmodernism and cultural studies have had the greatest effect on mainstream urban thought (“The postmodern debate” 433). Her latest research on New York City suggests that “media discourse, along with economic power, state power, and consumer culture, shapes the contemporary urban experience” (*Naked City* 27). This Marxist tradition of urban theory provides a useful theoretical dimension in my analysis of the spatial and social divisions, as well as power relationships, that underpin modern metropolises.

From the 1980s onward, the influence of cultural studies on urban scholars has been clearly felt. Urban researchers began to borrow the critical lens of cultural studies in order to interpret postmodern urban questions. So-called cultural urbanists, for instance, utilized Walter Benjamin’s pre-World War Two formulation of the *flâneur* to understand the implications and impact of urban spectacles, often in the forms of urban architecture and visual arts. The *flâneur* was a fictional character prominent in Charles Baudelaire, depicted as a dandy who strolled through Paris’s streets and became intrigued by modern urban spectacles. His walking and meandering allowed him to gain an insight into the city. Benjamin theorized the term *flâneur*, making it a useful analytical perspective through which to interpret the modern city. The *flâneur* can not only be regarded as an archetype of fictional urban characters in

nineteenth-century Paris, but also a theoretical framework that is repeatedly used by urban scholars as a methodological model. The perspective of the *flâneur* makes sense to social theorists because of “the potential affinities between this activity [*flânerie*] and the sociologist’s investigation of the social world” (Frisby, “The *Flâneur*” 89). These “affinities” are utilized by cultural theorists through recognizing the city as a “discourse [...] truly a language” (Barthes 168) and “*flânerie* is a kind of reading of the street” (Franz Hessel qtd. in Frisby, “The *Flâneur*” 81). By treating the city as a text, such a semiotic excavation of urban meaning enabled later theorists to utilize linguistic and semiotic methodologies to reveal in greater detail the relationship between the urban “text” and its socio-political power structures. This is where poststructuralist and postmodern theories become particularly illuminating. Informed by Ferdinand de Saussure’s and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s work, Roland Barthes, for one, analyzed the concepts of signification, myth and ideology. His ideas helped explain the complex relationship between the urban text and power. They also augmented existing modes of analysis of urban problems through perceiving the unstable relationship between the signifier and the signified. The perspective of the *flâneur* therefore offers me a basic methodology to examine the perspective of the detective in the second part of the dissertation. As will be demonstrated, it proves to be a highly relevant and useful concept in interpreting the meaning of literary representations of the city in particular, and the socio-political processes of urbanization more generally.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, urbanists began to pay increasing attention to the idea of urban geography. For them, the city provides both a physical and virtual space for urban memories, imaginings, stereotypes

and class relationships to form and overlap, and it is where they are further appropriated and conditioned through cultural and historical configurations. These multiple relationships and histories are often concealed by a myriad of signs to be found in urban architectures, streets and landscapes. Having perceived the cartographical nature of urban topography, contemporary cultural urbanists refer back to Benjamin by using the “detective” (Morawski 183, Shields 61, 63) eye embedded in the *flâneur*, to conduct an almost “forensic” (Stevenson 8) reading of the city. As Deborah Stevenson summarises, the “spatial practices” of the city “create a myriad of narrative maps” that need an observant medium to transform the “cartographic space into places of meaning and memory” (55). But the subjective nature of interpretation and the vexed relationship between the signifier and the signified, as Barthes revealed, makes the reading of urban landscapes a personal experience. How one walks through the city determines what one will find. Such a revelation opens theoretical avenues for psychogeographers like Michel de Certeau, Guy Debord, and Will Self who explore the city through an individualistic perspective. Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), and Self’s *PsychoGeography* (2007) have formulated the idea of psychogeography and problematised the interpretation of the urban.

Methodology

While the rich theoretical frameworks surrounding the topic of urbanism (especially in social science and cultural studies) provide a fertile ground in which I can conduct my research, it also makes it difficult to map out useful

aspects that can be utilized in identifying the comparable aspects of these urban literary texts. At the centre of this challenge lies the loose denotation of the term “urban”. When it is placed before “fiction”, it does not immediately form a terminology that describes an independent genre.¹⁵ This semantic uncertainty is also recognized by urban sociologists such as Louis Masotti and John Walton. They argue that the term “urban” often points to a “specious” nature that obscures the “real” research theme and focus (3). What they mean is that there are a series of cultural, sociological and literary dimensions contained within the umbrella term of “urban” which demand independent investigation; for example, urban consumerism, urban class division, urban crime, and urban immigration. These examples demonstrate the fragmented nature of urban research topics. In literature, novels with an urban setting are often grouped under more theme-specific sub-genres that carry the label urban: such as “urban thriller”, or “urban romance”. This creates obstacles for grouping urban texts under focused themes, specific genres or sub-genres.

A different challenge is the nature of the dissertation as a critical investigation into “comparative literature” research. As early as the 1960s, René Wellek and Austin Warren recognized that “the term ‘comparative’ literature is troublesome” because “no distinct system can [...] emerge from the accumulation of such studies” (46-48). What they mean is that comparing A with B does not immediately lead to useful comparative focuses. These potential challenges make it exceptionally important for me to identify a clear methodological framework. Within this framework, the discussion of my

¹⁵ There is a genre in American literature that describes itself as “urban fiction”. The term was coined by the black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, in his essay “The Souls of Black Folk” (1903). The literary genre mainly deals with the theme of African Americans’ life on the street. It is also called “street-lit”. Robert Beck’s *Pimp* (1969) is an example of such texts.

chosen literary texts can centre on useful theoretical concepts which will lend them a lucid structure and energize the discussion at the same time. So what methodological and theoretical tools should I choose to guide me through the investigation of the rich urban literary texts of New York and Shanghai? What are the principles to govern my choice of texts and angles of discussion? What are the useful theoretical concepts surrounding urbanization that can be used to organize my discussion?

To answer these questions, I need to return to the urban theories I have reviewed earlier. As the above overview of urban theory suggests, two aspects have proved to be particularly tenacious in contemporary urban studies. One points to the concept of commodification and its position in contemporary urban culture. First conceptualized by Marx in his discussion of capitalism, commodification has become a key idea in explaining capitalism, its active role in the realm of social differentiation and its part in the changing relationship between production and consumption in the contemporary period. This warrants a theoretical basis capable of examining such topics as consumption, consumer culture and commodity fetishism, which have gradually become prominent themes in contemporary novels about New York and Shanghai since the 1980s. Theories of commodification provide a basis to group together the novels of Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, Candace Bushnell, Wei Hui and Wang Anyi in the first part of the dissertation. And they will further provide a way to bring together these two global centres of commerce, New York and Shanghai.

The second theoretical aspect is the discussion of urban space. The cartographical features of the urban landscape and its implication in the

“construction, representation and reproduction of cultural meanings and power relations” (Stevenson 62) make it a key area under examination in recent urban theoretical debates. The notion of urban geography, as it has been recently theorized, is illuminating in examining the urban crime (sub)genre, which shows sustained energy as a popular genre in the contemporary period. The theoretical emphasis on the notion of urban space becomes more pertinent when it is nuanced by a temporal perspective, which makes time and space an integrated unity. The term “TimeSpace”, coined by Jon May and Nigel Thrift to indicate the interconnectedness of the relationship between time and space, therefore becomes particularly useful to this dissertation and serves as my theoretical point of departure when analysing urban crime.¹⁶ It allows me to group Linda Fairstein’s and Qiu Xiaolong’s novels together in the second part of this dissertation. Both their novels draw heavily on the urban space, culture and history of New York and Shanghai. This dissertation explores how theories of TimeSpace assist the interpretation of urban crime in these two cities.

Continuing academic interest in commodification and urban topography is indicative of their central positions in contemporary urban life. This also echoes my research findings of the key themes of contemporary New York and Shanghai novels. The relevance of these particular sociological, cultural and philosophical theories of urbanization to the themes of these selected urban novels allows me to bring together theory and interpretation, text and context, genre and city. This dissertation therefore forms two parts, respectively considered under the thematic focal points of commodification and crime. Recent theories of commodification form the basis for the discussion in Part I

¹⁶ The term “TimeSpace”, a concept coined by Jon May and Nigel Thrift to emphasize on the interconnectedness of space and time, problematises contemporary urbanists’ reading of urban space and time. See May and Thrift 1-6.

of this dissertation. The theoretical excavation of the concept of TimeSpace forms the organizational tool for the discussion of urban crime novels in Part II.

Text and Context: A Brief Overview of New York and Shanghai Fiction since the 1980s

The rampant consumer culture of 1980s New York generated a strong reaction from writers. The 1980s saw the burgeoning of a group of young writers, described by Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney as the “Blank Generation”(vii). This included Tama Janowitz, Mary Gaitskill, Lynn Tillman, Gary Indiana, David Wojnarowicz, Dennis Cooper and Joel Rose, and more famously, Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis. Diverse in their narratives and themes, they share, however, an interest in consumerism. Writers such as McInerney and Ellis “neatly reflected” the features of 1980s New York with “the world of cocaine, Wall Street, exotic eateries and major-label suits” as the “common reference” to their literary creations (Annesley, *Blank Fictions* 5). The emphasis on surface, material excess and spiritual void demonstrated both in form and content by these writers began to arouse the attention of critics such as Young and Caveney who recognized their writing as “a revealing critique of the society and illuminat[ion] [of] all its darkest, weirdest corners” (viii). Their often deliberately upsetting representations of consumer culture and media culture, according to Peter Brooker, “display the fragmented, strung-out or hollowed subjectivities and disjointed mini-narratives that have come to be associated with the effects of visual media and the anonymity of the urban postmodern” (142).

Their contemplation of consumerism and media culture was shared by other contemporary writers who chose to join these downtown writers' carnival to "celebrate the city's grit and grunge" with their own nuanced interpretations (Zukin, *Naked City* 15). Tom Wolfe, for example, decided to write a realistic novel of his own to match "this astonishing metropolis" while he was waiting for the advent of a great epochal novel on New York City (vii-viii). His *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1988) was intended as a new realism: "a highly detailed realism based on reporting, a realism more thorough than any currently being attempted" (Wolfe xvii) to reveal what Brooker has called the "racial tension, scandal and disgrace for the white upper middle class" in New York (138). Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1987), on the other hand, signals another important literary effort to interpret the city in its transition to postmodernity. Auster demonstrates the influences of classic cultural movements in his multi-layered storylines with the "pacing and narrative build of a detective tale" (Gioia). It is, as Ted Gioia argues, "very much the quintessential post-modern work of fiction". Indeed, 1980s New York has inspired a good number of writers to turn decennial excitements into literary creativity. Although they have different thematic emphases in their representations of 1980s New York, these writers share a certain common interest in demonstrating the rampant consumerism and capitalist greed that they saw as defining the decade.

The production of these epochal novels was deeply grounded in the socio-economic development of the city. In the late 1970s, New York City stepped out of the economic uncertainty that had characterised that decade and welcomed an economic boom that lasted for about ten years, until the city was

hit by a major stock market crash in 1987. Although it is still debatable what the fundamental forces were that dragged New York City out of economic doom, American economists have generally agreed that the city revived under the free market policies of Ronald Reagan and Mayor Edward I. Koch.¹⁷ A new generation of young, rich professionals emerged, symbolizing a transitional age of wealth. As Nicolaus Mills argues: “The real economic hero of the culture of triumph was, however, the dream consumer, the yuppie” (15). However, while those in the city’s traditional upper echelons and the new players in its financial sectors benefited hugely from the economic reversal and revival of Wall Street, the 1980s was also a decade that “yielded a legacy of increased poverty and social inequality” (Brooker 130).

Following the economic boom of the 1980s, a demographic “sea change” (Sleeper 7) revealed itself in the ethnic fabric of the city. New York City “became less than half white at some point during the mid-1980s” (Sleeper 8). This can be perceived through the burgeoning of a good number of ethnic writers who either lived or published in New York at that time. Although not directly depicting the city in their novels, writers such as Toni Morrison, Cristina Garcia, and Aurora and Rosario Morales exemplified the ethnic diversity that began to change every aspect of life in New York. At the same time, such financial crimes as the sensational Ivan Boesky case, as well as violent urban crimes like the notorious Central Park jogger case, began to reveal the intricate “working[s] of late capitalism” (Brooker 129).

¹⁷ According to Phillip Lopate, Mayor Koch enthusiastically facilitated investments by business corporations in his capacity as Mayor and proved “at least an entertaining cheerleader for the surprising economic boom (fuelled by foreign investments) that lasted from 1977 to 1987” See Lopate 543.

In the following decade, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's urban renewal plan moved the focus of the city government towards cracking down on crime and cleaning up the streets. Through great efforts, the Manhattan area of New York City in the 1990s was made a safer place with crimes being pushed to outer boroughs. The city, however, was characterized by a divided urban topography that was almost an index to its criminal, as well as its economic, situation. Sociological statistics indicate that New York's high crime rate—a direct result of the crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s—dropped dramatically under Giuliani's zero-tolerance policy (Lueck). However, there are counter-claims to suggest that the drop in the crime rate started well before Giuliani came into office.¹⁸ Such claims suggest that the lowering of the crime rate seems to be more closely associated with the city's economic recovery, which occurred around the time of Giuliani's appointment, than with his drastic policing measures. As I will argue in Part II of this dissertation, such historical details are intriguingly captured by the crime fiction writer Linda Fairstein in her Alexandra Cooper series. However, urban crime also appears as a recurrent theme in the work of many other New York writers such as Tom Wolfe, Paul Auster, Richard Price, and Bret Easton Ellis in 1980s and 1990s America. This indicates the impact of urban crime on literary writing about New York and justifies my choice of Fairstein's two novels in this dissertation.

What became increasingly influential and dominant in New York cultural life in the 1990s was the complicity of consumerism and the mass media. The former infiltrated each and every New Yorker's life through a proliferation of the latter. They intensified the impact of urbanization on

¹⁸ The study of New York City's homicide rate from 1985-1996 suggests that "attributing non-gun homicide declines to law enforcement was premature and unjustified". See Fagan, Zimring and Kim.

individuals while crediting surfaces, signs, images and symbols with greater importance than ever. Surfaces and signs became commodities, further impacting upon the lives and values of New Yorkers. A number of female American writers emerged at this juncture to celebrate consumer culture in a more dedicated manner that approached genuine worship. Labelled as “chick lit” authors, this group of female writers includes names such as Candace Bushnell, Melissa Bank and Lauren Weisberger. Their works demonstrate a literary representation of commodity fetishism and display great faith to consumer brands, physical appearance and female sexual liberty. Bushnell’s *Sex and City* (1996) is a typical example of such writing. The novel has enjoyed huge commercial success since its adaptation in 1998 into a long-running TV series and has become “the Bible” for female urbanites ever since. Its success showcases the power of mass media in championing consumerism and promoting commodity fetishism. If, by comparison, there is still a genuine residue of irony within the works by the “Blank Generation” writers, some of whom recognized and helped to “close the gap between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art forms” (Young 14), then the chick-lit writers treat consumer culture and media culture seriously. Their almost religious belief in commodities and media culture often overshadows their precarious critiques of contemporary culture, making a genuine critique of consumerism difficult to extrapolate from their writing.

New York in the twenty-first century has been defined and irredeemably changed by the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. The literary urban landscape has been greatly altered, too, by the tragedy. The themes of terrorist attack, trauma and

healing have been explored by many New York novelists. Although diversified and multi-themed, novels such as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) all use the 9/11 attacks as a major theme. However, it is not my intention to consider these novels in this dissertation due to the uniqueness of 9/11 to New York life and literature. Although there is a possibility of using the theme of trauma to frame a comparative study of post-9/11 New York novels and those Shanghai novels that represent the theme of the Cultural Revolution (and its traumatic aftermath), the social contexts of these urban texts are vastly different. I will therefore only pursue the themes of commodification and crime in this dissertation and hope to explore these other New York novels in future research.

In Shanghai, by comparison, the past three decades have witnessed a total transformation of the city. To compare the skyline of Shanghai (especially Pudong District) as it appeared thirty years ago and as it stands today (in 2010) will probably be sufficient to show the intensity and speed of Shanghai's urban regeneration. In 1978, the Pudong area, on the east side of the Huangpu River (Shanghai's equivalent to the Hudson), was still farmland with a flat skyline. Today, its *Lujiazui* area is dotted with skyscrapers towering into the sky. Combining the *Lujiazui* skyscrapers with those in the Puxi area (the west side of the Huangpu River), Shanghai is now crowned the sixth city in the world with the highest number of skyscrapers.¹⁹ This impressive skyline was a direct result of the Reform and Opening-up Policy implemented by the Chinese

¹⁹ According to Emporis (2009 data), a German company providing global commercial real estate information and construction data, Shanghai ranks No. 6 among world cities that own the most skyscrapers. The top city is Hongkong, followed by New York, Seoul, Chicago and Singapore.

government in Shanghai in 1992. When the city's Pudong area became a Special Economic Zone in that year, Shanghai's economy began to soar. The privileged geographical location it has enjoyed as the biggest port city on China's east coast, as well as its historical heritage as a commercial city, allowed Shanghai to grow faster than other cities like Shenzhen and Zhuhai, which were among the first group of cities to open up after 1978.

However, when compared with New York's progressive and occasionally sluggish urban renewal in the same three decades, Shanghai's stunning speed of economic development has come at a price. The intensity of urban transformation and the impact of the global market economy were accompanied by a tremendous sense of loss felt among its citizens. Since the late 1980s, writers of different age groups have begun to interpret Shanghai's rising ambition and an existential angst felt by the citizens following its economic transformation.²⁰ A surge of writing focused thematically on the city of Shanghai in the 1990s. This was the result not only of the city's (as well as the country's) publishing industry, which began to revive under the free market economy in the early 1990s, but also revealed a tendency for writers to redefine Shanghai's position during China's economic transition. The first group of writers includes names such as Chen Naishan and Cheng Danyan who unanimously chose to embed their stories of the city in historical settings, with a strong sense of nostalgia. Both writers based their narratives on family memoirs or the memoirs of Shanghai socialites between 1920s and 1940s. Capitalizing on the city's glamorous "Old Shanghai" (*lao shanghai*) past

²⁰ I use the word "age-group" to endorse the taxonomy of Chinese writers by literary critics in recent decades. Instead of differentiating them according to genres or subgenres, the critics group these writers according to their ages and generations, such as the "post-70s" and "post-80s" writers. See A. Zhu xix.

between the 1920s and 1940s thus proved to be a highly successful market strategy.²¹ A sense of nostalgia, real or imagined, was clearly felt in the cultural life at that time. Chen Naishan's *Blue House* (1983) and *The Banker* (1990) were among the first works of fiction to capitalize on Old Shanghai. Well received, they started a trend of similar writing. Chen Danyan, who followed suit, published *Shanghai Memorabilia* (1998), *Shanghai Princess* (1999), and *Shanghai Beauty* (2000). Her novels reinforced the Old Shanghai nostalgia among the public, making it a popular theme in literary and cultural life. Their contemporary, Wang Anyi, pursued a similarly nostalgic trend with her own perceptive interpretation. Her novel *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (1996) can be understood not only as a continuous effort to interpret nostalgia for "Old Shanghai", but also as a questioning of the validity of such nostalgic sentiments.

Nostalgic writing about Shanghai produced in the 1990s also served as a forceful response to the social and economic impact of global consumer culture on the city. The rise in consumer culture fostered by China's open-door policy resonated well with nostalgic images of a prosperous, cosmopolitan Old Shanghai between the 1920s and 1940s. The literary representation of Old Shanghai thus allowed writers to appropriate an illusory version of the city through a combination of memory and imagination. Such nostalgia can be regarded as an unconscious quest for history and roots by Shanghai residents in order to accommodate themselves to the drastic socio-economic changes that were happening in the 1990s. As Zhang Xudong argues:

nostalgia has become a way for Shanghai residents to absorb a

²¹ Old Shanghai is a term used to describe 1920s-1940s Shanghai when the city was claimed to be a global economic centre that was as influential as Paris, London, New York and Tokyo. See Meng vii.

socioeconomic shock, culturally, as the tidal wave of commodities and consumption is seen through the misty veil of past images made vivid by an avalanche of old photos, calendars, postcards, cigarette boxes, and advertisements beautifully reprinted and sold as ‘classics’ (186).

Zhang demonstrates the cultural obsession with Old Shanghai nostalgia and reveals the mentality of the general public at a time of drastic socio-economic transition. Through unpacking the delicate relationship between consumer culture and nostalgia, he shows that it is crucial to interpret the representation of nostalgia in order to understand the social context of 1990s Shanghai. Therefore to understand the relationship between nostalgia and consumerism is key to interpret the Shanghai writers covered in this thesis.

The second group of writers who reacted to such “socioeconomic shock” hard-headedly in their own way consists of so-called post-70s “beauty writers” (*meinǚ zuojia*) with their “body writing” (*shenti xiezu*) (Zhong 635-36). More than a generation younger than most Old Shanghai writers, they championed a Western lifestyle that accentuated individualism. Literary writing became a cultural domain in which to embrace democracy and freedom. Wei Hui and Mian Mian were undoubtedly the main spokeswomen for this literary group at that time. Explicitly representing female sexuality and a non-traditional lifestyle, frequently in association with bars and drugs, their writing revealed shifting social values and the rapidly changing cultural life of Shanghai.

A third group of writers dealt with the theme of the city from a very different angle. Most authors in this group were “educated youth” (*zhìqīng*), mobilized to rural areas in their 20s by Mao’s doctrines during the Cultural

Revolution.²² Although in most cases, their country life experiences formed the main theme of their novels, these writers approached the city through a comparative perspective. This comparison, however, has complicated literary interpretations of the city as it bears an embedded critique of China's urbanization. On one hand, the city was depicted as a place of civilization and advancement when compared to the backwardness of the country. On the other hand, the memory of innocent life in the country served as a strong contrast to the frenetic experience of living in the city. The "educated youth" writers of Shanghai included names such as Ye Xin, Zhao Lihong, Lu Xin'er and Wang Anyi. Wang's early works can be regarded as a typical example of such writing, although she has changed her style throughout her literary career. Ye Xin's works provoked a strong social reaction in 1990s Shanghai. The popular TV series *Sinful Debts* (*niezhai*) (1995) based on his eponymous novel caused a national sensation among its viewers.²³ The realistic depiction of the hard life in the country and homesickness for the city made their writing a unique subgenre categorized as "educated youth literature".

What is shared by these authors is their employment of the city, in this case Shanghai, as a major theme in their novels. Although Shanghai is represented using different social backgrounds and historical times, the fact

²² The term "Educated youth" refers to those educated young people who were mobilized to leave their city homes and relocate to rural areas under Mao's doctrines during the Cultural Revolution. "Educated youth" writers often draw on their tough life experiences in rural areas and their traumatic experiences during the Cultural Revolution as the thematic basis for their writing. Because of the dominance of traumatic themes, their writing is also called "scar literature". See Berry, *A History of Pain* 6, 10.

²³ *Sinful Debts* (dir. Huang Shuqin) is a TV series based on Ye Xin's eponymous novel. It describes the story of some of the abandoned children of the "educated youth" who came to Shanghai to look for their parents. The "educated youth" in the TV series were mobilized to Yun Nan Province during the Cultural Revolution. Some of them married local people and had children there. When they were allowed to return to Shanghai, some of them chose to leave their children in the care of foster parents. The reunions of these children with their city parents caused a series of new problems. The TV series focused on the emotional encounters and economic challenges they faced. The TV series made a commercial hit in the 1990s, won two professional prizes and received a record audience rating of 42.62%.

that the image of Shanghai has spurred a boom in literary production indicates the beginning of what Fredric Jameson calls “the culture of the simulacrum” (18). The literary image of Shanghai has become a popular commodity that is under constant reinterpretation by contemporary writers.

However, the different stages of urbanization in Shanghai and New York complicate the comparisons of their literary representations. In addition to the dramatic differences between the historical, cultural, and political traditions of these two cities, a time gap can also be felt among the literary themes and concerns articulated by writers who represent Shanghai and New York in their fictions. In other words, the issues that preoccupy Shanghai writers in the 1990s and 2000s—for example, rampant consumer culture, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the influence of mass media and popular culture—are a central concern to American writers active in New York between the 1980s and the 1990s. For this reason, the urban texts in this dissertation are organized under focused themes instead of the time of publication. More specifically, Wei’s and Wang’s novels, although published in the 1990s, are grouped together with the fictions of McInerney, Ellis, Bushnell because of their shared interest in consumerism. Meanwhile, Qiu’s fictions from the 2000s and Fairstein’s 1990s novels are similarly grouped together as a result of their shared preoccupation with crime.

The Detective Genre and the City

It is also necessary, at this point, to look briefly at the relationship between the detective genre and the city, since the second part of this dissertation will use

four detective novels to build a comparative analysis. An overview of the detective genre shows that it is traditionally a European and American genre. This culturally alien form of detective fiction was introduced to Chinese writing in the early twentieth century through a Shanghai writer, Cheng Xiaoqing, who distinguished himself as an extremely successful and popular detective fiction writer between 1920 and 1940. Although Cheng did little more than appropriate Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes character to fit a local context, his Detective Huo Sang series enjoyed great commercial success and Huo Sang is now remembered as the prototype for Chinese detective characters. Unfortunately, as with any other literary production "tainted" with Western bourgeois ideology, the development of the detective genre was hampered by the Cultural Revolution. It was not until the late 1970s that the sub-genre returned in the form of the *Gong'an* series, that is, the Chinese police procedural.²⁴ Yet it lost its appeal and became relatively anonymous, with only a handful of writers working in this subgenre. The Shanghai writer Cao Zhengwen, who has been active since the 1980s, is an example. In his passion for the detective genre, he attempted to incorporate Chinese social reality into his police procedural series, however, since he was also deeply influenced by traditional *Wu Xia* fiction (China's swordman fiction), Cao's novels revealed apparent generic slips in the scientific and factual details of his detective investigations.²⁵ This perhaps roughly explains

²⁴ The *Gong'an* series is a term used to describe the Chinese detective novel since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The word *Gong'an* literally means public security in Chinese. *Gong'an* novels are based on police procedurals, whether fictional or documentary. It proved a popular genre in the PRC at a time when private-eye detective novels were deemed to be "bourgeois" in nature and remained under strict censorship. It is only recently that private-eye detective novels have begun to regain popularity, although the majority of them still face strict censorship. For example, the authors are asked not to reveal the real place names or people's names in their narratives.

²⁵ *Wu Xia* fiction is a unique Chinese literary genre that draws heavily on the *kungfu* tradition.

the frustrations that the detective genre has encountered in China—a society in which the legal system has been far from perfect and the influences of a patriarchal feudal tradition remained strong. It is only recently that another Shanghainese writer, Qiu Xiaolong, has established himself within this genre. Although based in America rather than China, Qiu draws heavily on the city of Shanghai and the memories of and changes in the city become his creative inspiration to adapt and appropriate this Western genre more fully.

There are a few explanations that account for a connection between the detective genre and Shanghai. One points to Shanghai's relatively liberal culture, ideology and market that made it possible for the detective genre to flourish. The second explanation reveals a connection between an urban environment and the detective genre. The city, as the very centre of capitalist transactions, is key to the genre. As argued at the beginning of Introduction, the *flâneur* is perhaps the first literary and theoretical model to connect the image of the detective with urban space. This partially explains the affinity between the genre and the city. It also justifies the appropriateness of choosing the detective genre to unify a comparative analysis of the urban texts of New York and Shanghai in this dissertation.

However, it is worth noting that the detective genre is still at an early stage of its development in China today. Among novels with a crime theme, there are two longer-standing, main branches: fiction characterised by themes explicitly concerned with the fight against corruption; and suspense and horror

The main characters in *Wu Xia* novels are Chinese swordsmen and knights who practise *kungfu* and defend social justice by using their *kungfu* skills. The theme of the stories emphasizes the punishment of social evils and the establishment of social justice. The stories usually deploy historical settings and some of the characters are based on historical figures. *Wu Xia* fiction began to be written during the period of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618—907) and developed into a popular literary form during the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1616—1912).

novels influenced by the Japanese tradition. Both of them, in a strict sense, differ from the Western detective genre.

In America, detective fiction has predominantly been a genre that caters to a white male readership, as a result of its private-eye, masculine heroes. The earliest American crime fiction writer is widely acknowledged to be Edgar Allan Poe, who is generally regarded as the inventor of detective fiction. Gradually, the crime fiction genre has developed into a cluster of subgenres relying on different ethnic, gender and social formulations. As Peter Messent argues, in the contemporary period there is a “general shift [from private-eye story] to police procedural” in American crime fiction (2). Noticeably, as a transatlantic genre that thrived through mutual fertilization with countries across the Atlantic, the crime genre has developed a distinctive new trajectory through its increasingly female writers. The archetype of female detective characters, according to Bethe Schoenfeld, can be dated back to Anna Katherine Green’s character of Amelia Butterworth in 1897 (836). In the Golden Age of detective fiction in Britain (1920—40), a number of women writers and characters became active in the public sphere. Most notably, Agatha Christie’s Miss Jane Marple became so influential that she became regarded as the archetypal figure of the female detective.

Although the American creation and reception of female detective characters occurred much later, it was in the United States that the female detective genre was able to flourish. Since the late 1970s, the burgeoning of a cohort of female American crime writers such as Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, Linda Barnes, Sue Grafton, Patricia Cornwell and Nevada Barr has taken the subgenre further and developed it in many ways. The variety of themes within

their work moves across class and ethnic lines and merits more critical attention than currently exists. Such a lack of critical attention is more apparent with the plethora of female detective characters in contemporary US television (for instance, Detective Robin Tunney in *The Mentalist* and night shift supervisor Catherine Willows in *Crime Scene Investigation*, to name a few).²⁶

It is not the purpose of this dissertation, however, to address the contributions of these female detective writers and characters, although my discussion of the much-neglected American writer, Linda Fairstein, and her protagonist, Alexandra Cooper, does prompt the important question as to why she has not drawn adequate scholarly attention from contemporary critics. A tentative explanation for this is that Fairstein has worked for the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit in the New York County District Attorney's office for thirty years and writing has only been a part-time profession for her. In this sense, her professional life as a sex crimes expert has restricted Fairstein's chances to promote her literary work within commercial and literary circles. At the same time, there is a perceived separation between different professions in American society that partially explains the challenges Fairstein was confronted with in order to establish herself within the literary field.²⁷ Fortunately, Fairstein broke through such boundaries by becoming a full-time writer after her retirement in 2002. In 2010, her novel, *Hell Gate*, became a New York Times bestseller.

²⁶ *The Mentalist* is an American police procedural television series which debuted on September 23, 2008, on CBS (Columbia Broadcast System). It follows the story of Patrick Jane who, as a paid consultant, aids the CBI (California Bureau of Investigation) in homicide investigations with unorthodox methods. *Crime Scene Investigation* is another ongoing American crime drama television series. Premiered in October 2000, it is now in its eleventh season.

²⁷ The cultural boundaries preventing inter-professional points of contact and restricted access to social mobility has been observed by many cultural theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Mike Featherstone, and David Thorns. Thorns believes that "cultural capital" is used by elite groups to "guard access [...] through elaborate mechanisms to control entry into their circles." See Thorns 127. Fairstein herself also attempted to articulate this idea in her novel *Likely to Die*. See my analysis of professional boundaries in Chapter Four.

To summarize the writing of Shanghai and New York and their socio-economic backgrounds of the past three decades in such a sweeping and brief manner risks over-simplification. Yet such a contextualization follows the organizational principles established earlier in the dissertation. The highly complicated comparative framework of this research makes it necessary for me to focus on more distinctive and focused literary themes, trends and writers that can bring the two cities into effective comparison. This above review, brief as it is, shall serve the purpose of positioning the central texts in the dissertation within their respective social context in the past three decades.

Structure of the Dissertation

Part I of the dissertation is formed by Chapters One and Two. As consumer culture has become a prominent theme for urban novels both in Shanghai and in New York in the last few decades, this part will discuss literary texts by examining the theme of commodification. The subject matter of Wei Hui's novels, *Shanghai Baby* (1999) and *Marrying Buddha* (2005), deals with the decadence of a young generation living under the impact of global consumer culture in 1990s Shanghai. Her novels warrant comparison with Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) and *Story of My Life* (1988), Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991) and Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1996). They share an emphasis on commodification and the narratives of these novels demonstrate the level of commodification of the two cities, and the ways in which such commodification is being represented in works of literary fiction.

Although, as has been previously explained, Shanghai and New York are at different stages of urbanization and there is a perceived gap between their literary productions, the literary representations of 1990s-2000s Shanghai have reached a similar level of “blankness” as the “Blank Generation” writers who were extremely active in 1980s New York. Writers like Wei Hui capture Shanghai’s transition to a consumer society and represent the city in a non-mainstream style. Her writing begins to show a sense of the blasé in its narrative form and content. Her attention to topics like sexuality, drugs and the city street echoes the concerns expressed by “Blank Generation” writers, but also resonates well with those literary and cultural preoccupations that “chick lit” writers take seriously in their works about New York.

In the American novels, there is a partial loss of self in favour of surface preoccupations, while the Chinese novels combine a similar fascination with surfaces in a very self-revelatory, almost confessional style. I seek to develop textual comparisons and contrasts in order to highlight the social, cultural and economic changes occurring in the two cities between 1980 and 2010. At the same time, I will use Ellis’s *American Psycho* as an extreme case to understand a sense of dramatized obsession with surfaces and the confrontation between the individual and the city’s highly commodified and mediated urban environments. The uncertainty of the narrative voice in Ellis’s novel becomes an interesting aspect for analysis. On the Shanghai side, while Wei Hui’s novels echo such an attachment to surfaces, brands and a sense of the loss of self, there is a tradition of consumer culture inherited from Old Shanghai that needs further exploration. The dissertation attempts to reveal the lineage of consumer culture in Shanghai through looking at Wang Anyi’s *The*

Song of Everlasting Sorrow (1996). Wang's depiction of Shanghai through an overarching period of forty years renders *The Song* a key novel in understanding the historical development and current tendencies of consumerism, as well as its effect on literary creation and marketization in Shanghai.

Surface has become an important notion to understand the relationship between the tendencies of consumerism and the literary representation of it. However, it is important to remember that surface is not just used as a notion to symbolize the evident emergence of branding, signs, and images in a consumer society but also, more significantly, to suggest an emphasis on the shallow, superficial and detached lifestyle that is underpinned by a materialistic bourgeois mentality. This should not necessarily encourage a moralistic interpretation of surfaces since they serve as a way to interpret the logic of late capitalism and a perspective to conduct a literary critique of social reality, but more importantly, they open up a philosophical understanding of the world in which we live.

Part II is formed by Chapters Three and Four, with a focus on a specific literary genre, crime fiction. Based on my reading of Franco Morretti, Woody Haut and David Schmid, who claim that urban knowledge can be gained through examining the representation of urban crime, this part is organized with the understanding that the crime genre's insistent emphasis on place (crime sites) and time (execution of crime) makes it a perfect example to examine the relationship between urban topography and urban social power relations: an aspect that becomes increasingly important for urban sociologists in the context of postmodernity. To unravel the mysteries of various crimes

provides, therefore, an alternative way to map out the city's social and political power structures. This will be achieved by looking at the literary representations of characters, crime sites, historical crime as well as legal institutions. I endeavour to test whether the theories surrounding the concept of "TimeSpace", coined by Jon May and Nigel Thrift to indicate the interconnectedness of time and space, can offer insights in interpreting urban crime texts. On a different note, crime fiction serves as a deliberate choice in this dissertation to problematise my comparative methodology, in the sense that crime fiction is an "imported" Western genre for the Chinese. In this way, the appropriation, reception and development of the genre can reveal the relationship between text and context.

In Part II, I will use two of Qiu Xiaolong's Inspector Chen series, *When Red is Black* (2004) and *Red Mandarin Dress* (2008), and two of Linda Fairstein's Prosecutor Alexandra Cooper series, *Likely to Die* (1997) and *Cold Hit* (1999), to develop my comparison. Qiu's detailed account of the city's geographical locations through various crime sites informs the reader of the cultural, historical and political dimensions of Shanghai. The socio-political theme disguised by his detective framework, on the other hand, allows an in-depth investigation into the city's/country's traumatic experience during the Cultural Revolution. In addition, it also allows an examination of Shanghai's current urban transitions which account for an equally major theme in Qiu's novels. On the New York side, Fairstein's realistic and detailed depiction of New York crimes and her knowledge of the city's history allow room for an investigation of the historical lineage of crimes in New York City. This makes her novels particularly comparable to Qiu's two novels. The thematic unity of

the two authors' novels facilitates the investigation of the relationship between crime and the city. By focusing on the ways in which both writers utilize time and space and the complicating role of history in their novels, this part aims to map out the socio-political power structures of the two cities through analyzing the literary representation of urban crime.

Conclusion

If the city can and should become a more distinctive and focused field of research in literary studies, then it is perhaps time to ask what overarching features and characteristics can be discerned within urban fiction to make it a more self-contained subgenre. The literary critical approach adopted in this dissertation ensures that there is a more discernible and specific "object" of study to engage with, among those frequently fragmented urban topics investigated in critical studies of the city thus far. The comparative framework I am using is not just intended to place those literary works that represent New York and Shanghai together in order to reveal the similarities and differences between them, but rather to use these texts as prototypes in order to understand how urbanism, as an ongoing global process, has affected literary themes, forms, styles, narratives, characters, and literary production and marketing as a whole. Although there is always a gap between fictional representations and "reality", literature's function as philosophical critique, "a still, small voice of calm and sanity in a clamorous ocean of hyperbole, frenzied advertising and ecstatic misinformation" (Young and Caveney vii), makes it a vital cultural

object through which we can understand how processes of urbanization have changed us, are changing us, and will continue to change us in the future.

Part I

Chapter One: The Exploration of Urban Experience in Contemporary New York Writing

In the opening pages of *Bright Lights, Big City* (BLBC), Jay McInerney describes a 1980s New York nightclub, which takes us immediately into a certain kind of metropolitan lifestyle. It is a description that is marked by peculiar urban imagery and an unusual second-person narrative:

You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. [...] The night has already turned on that imperceptible pivot where two A.M. changes to six A.M. You know this moment has come and gone, but you are not yet willing to concede that you have crossed the line beyond which all is gratuitous damage and the palsy of unraveled nerve endings. [...] Your brain at this moment is composed of brigades of tiny Bolivian soldiers (1-2).

McInerney's depiction of New York has a specific place and time: a nightclub in the early morning. There is imagery indicating the features of 1970-80s sub-cultural groups: "a girl with a shaved head" and "Bolivian Marching Powder" (cocaine). However, the clarity of the description is undermined by the narrator's physical confusion under, possibly, the effect of cocaine. He can't decide the exact name of the club, nor can he specify how long he has been there. The description of his physical reaction to cocaine is associated with metaphors such as "the unravelled nerve endings" and "tiny Bolivian soldiers". These unfamiliar images symbolize a metropolitan experience—one that is associated with the exploration of human physical experiences. And most interestingly, McInerney adopts an unusual second-person narrative voice. The casual, conversational tone of the second-person narrative voice immediately

sets itself apart from the conventional first-person and third-person narrative, indicating a sense of experimentation within the text.

Apparently, McInerney's version of New York is different from the New York depicted by some of his contemporaries. It is not the urban labyrinth in which Paul Auster's protagonist gets lost in his *New York Trilogy* (1987). Neither is it the multi-ethnic New York where violence and social divisions grow under rapid urban demographic changes in Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). McInerney's New York has begun to show what James Annesley has called "a new direction" of 1980s American culture in his *Blank Fictions* (1998). For Annesley, McInerney's novels and other "blank fiction[s]" indicate that "culture is taking a new direction, exploring new kinds of experiences and moving towards new forms and subjects" (1). Moreover, the term "blank fiction", for Annesley, has described the thematic preoccupation with consumerism as well as the formal change to a "blank, atonal" (2) narrative voice in the writing of McInerney and certain other American writers in the 1980s. Indeed, the 1980s New York literary scene is filled with such literary themes, languages, characters and forms. Whether they are termed as "Blank Generation" writers by Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney, or Lower East Side "Downtown" writers, or the literary "brat-pack", their texts essentially deal with New York yuppies and "all aspects of contemporary urban life: crime, drugs, sexual excess, media overload, consumer madness, inner-city decay and fashion-crazed nightlife" (Young and Caveney vi).

What triggered such writing were the social changes happening in 1980s New York. Particular social and political events became defining moments of the decade: Wall Street Mania, especially the speeding-up of day-to-day

trading that anticipated the internet; globalization; the rise of Silicon Valley; and the emergence of AIDS, defined the decade. In particular, the fall of Wall Street prodigies like Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky due to financial fraud and illegal profiting from the stock market further exemplified the 1980s as “a decade of greed” (Thompson, 13). In its cultural domain, the rise of master chefs and supermodels as the new celebrities of the city, the lurid cinematic manifestations that encompassed violence (*Taxi Driver* [1976]) and junkyard civilization (*Batman* [1989]), and a “giddy, playful, shallow atmosphere” which prevailed in the art world (Lopate 543), all pinpointed the shifting tendency towards a culture of surfaces and excessive consumerism. Daniel Grassian has claimed that “[t]he 1980s ushered in a new phase of American capitalism that involved the cultural domination of an ‘individual’, whose ‘identity’ became largely determined by consumer/popular/post-modern culture” (12). Similarly, Hendrik Hertzberg has argued that:

The gleaming, empty towers of yuppiedom betoken not prosperity but imminent collapse. The intimations—political, demographic, cultural, economic, journalistic, and culinary—are everywhere that yuppiedom is (to use a popular yuppie phrase, possibly connected with the well-known yuppie preference for grilled fish and crunchy vegetables) dead meat (67-68).

Hertzberg’s argument reveals the superficial and inert quality of yuppie culture, in the sense that its attachment to surfaces has resulted in a nihilistic, lifeless and stagnant cultural experience. Such a cultural preoccupation with surfaces was an important corollary of the economic recovery following Reaganism in the early 1980s. The “new phase of American capitalism” described by Grassian is predominantly characterized by the pervasive privatization and *laissez-faire* economic policy championed by Reaganomists. Against such a background, surfaces of various natures (images, pictures, human faces and

bodies in modeling, advertisements, and mass media industries) were heavily exploited by cultural industries to make money. Surfaces were paraded in fiction and films, to the extent that they, in turn, began to define the decade and its New York culture. Although the accentuation of surfaces has always been a feature of American capitalism, it is in the 1980s that New York City really began to experience a proliferation of surfaces, accompanied by an intensification of consumerism and a rising yuppie culture whose features entered into the mainstream life of New Yorkers.

The pulse of this cultural shift can be felt through changes in literary form. While this point has been recognized by critics like Young, Caveney and Annesley who have tried to pinpoint formal developments in contemporary American literature, the relationship between literary form and context is complicated and deserves further investigation. Building on the scholarship of Young, Caveney and Annesley, this chapter explores novels that use New York as their vital setting, in the sense that their stories are contextualized specifically by New York City in the covered period, rather than any other American cities. These novels include Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights*, and *Story of My Life* (SML), Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (AP); and Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (SATC).

This chapter argues that the formal features of these works reflect the context of contemporary New York. At the centre of my discussion is a focused examination of the relationship between narrative and context, surface and depth, the city and its literary persona, through a detailed textual analysis. I argue that these novels seek to address the idea of surface not only as a

characteristic of the social reality of 1980s New York and beyond but, more importantly, as a narrative strategy to represent, ridicule and transcend it.

The investigation of narrative surfaces (for example, narrative voice, tense, and linguistic style) assumes the central position in my discussion. In this analysis, I am concerned with exploring the following research questions: how do the defining characteristics of 1980s New York society enter into literary narratives? How is the persona of New York portrayed by these authors? Although summarizing the general features of a city's represented personalities often risks overgeneralization, it serves the purpose of revealing the specific social construction of New York City and its impact upon individuals in this chapter. The examination of a city's persona through its fictional characters will facilitate my interpretation of New York City and underpin the comparisons between New York and Shanghai in this dissertation.

Commodified Language and Surface Narratives

In many critics' eyes, McInerney's *Bright Lights* seems to have touched upon the wreckage of a quintessentially 1980s American dream and captured its skin-deep quality in a light-hearted manner. Set at a time when some sections of New York were still recovering from the city's financial nadir in the 1970s, the novel's narrative, like the city, speeds up.²⁸ Both the city and the novel are permeated with a frenetic, go-getting ambition to recover quickly from the economic recession of the 1970s. This can be perceived not only from the

²⁸ Sam Roberts notes the fragility of New York's economic growth in this period, asking: "How close did New York City come to bankruptcy in 1975 after the Ford administration rebuffed its appeals for help? The margin between solvency and default may have been paper-thin." See Roberts.

author's enthusiasm for narrative experimentation—possibly an attempt to achieve shock value and market appeal in New York's 1980s literary scene—but also in the style of language used in his two early novels. Written in an indifferent, distant and casual tone, both McInerney's *Bright Lights* and *Story of My Life* demonstrate the nihilism and emotional void of some privileged New York individuals in the 1980s. His representation of night clubs, drug taking and sexual indulgence in New York City has been dismissed by many commentators as lacking in substance.²⁹ According to such critics, these novels are closer to high-class gossip or guidebooks to a yuppie lifestyle than insightful or thought-provoking works of literary fiction.

Similar questions can be asked about Ellis's highly commodified language, as well as about McInerney's blasé tone. The most distinctive feature of *American Psycho* is its constant allusion to brand names, attire, restaurants and bars in Manhattan. Ellis's linguistic style is distinctively mechanical and artificial, often tainted by a litany of lifeless commercial jargon that precludes the reader from identifying with the commodities he is describing. In addition, he uses this highly commodified narrative form to evoke the extreme misogyny and violence of his protagonist, Patrick Bateman. Ellis claims to have received thirteen anonymous death threats and his publisher, Sonny Mehta, president of Vintage, also received abusive letters and phone calls for agreeing to publish the novel. The publication of *American Psycho* also provoked a boycott from the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Organization for Women, which urged people not to buy the book. The graphic account of sadism towards women, the incessant use of brand names, restaurants and bars, together with

²⁹ Zoltán Abádi-Nagy has said in his "The Narratorial Function in Minimalist Fiction" that "some reviewers swore the book was without substance or message." See Abádi-Nagy 9.

an unreliable narrator makes *American Psycho* a challenge to read. Roger Rosenblatt, for one, publicly expressed his revulsion at the book and even asked for parental discretion towards some of the details in the novel. The criticism of its explicit depiction of violence and misogyny formed the central critique of Ellis's novel at the time of its publication.

These three novels show that McInerney and Ellis share an obsession with the surfaces of New York life; whether these are expressed in the empty yuppie lifestyle of excessive clubbing, drinking, drugs and sex, or in their attachments to fashion and branding. And this is echoed by their styles of language which have a shared sense of indifference, to the point of appearing bland and blank. Such a connection between these two authors is strengthened by the intertextuality of their literary works and the inter-connectedness of their literary careers. For example, Alison Poole, the protagonist in McInerney's *Story of My Life*, is also a character in Ellis's *American Psycho*. In terms of their literary career, both belong to the "brat-pack" group of writers. They have also been members of the Lower East Side quarterly literary magazine *Between C & D*.³⁰ Such an interesting intertextuality and their shared focus on "Sex. Drugs. Danger. Violence. Computers." (a tagline of the magazine) reveals the dominant influences of the decade on Ellis's and McInerney's writing. While their thematic and stylistic lack of substance has made their novels the subject of attack, it is precisely this attention to surfaces that pervades the novels of

³⁰ *Between C & D* (1983-1990) was a Lower East Side quarterly literary magazine edited by Joel Rose and Catherine Texier. The title is not only a geographical reference to New York City (between Avenue C and D), but also suggests "between coke and dope", giving an indication of its transgressive content and ethos. The tagline of the magazine was "Sex. Drugs. Danger. Violence. Computers." The magazine was printed on computer paper, sold in a plastic bag and featured original artwork on each binding. See Young and Caveney 8.

McInerney and Ellis, constituting their seriousness and distinguishing them from other New York writers of this period.

In order to understand the cultural obsession with surfaces in 1980s New York, it is necessary to consider the word “surface”. Surface is a term that brings together appearances, signs, and images— notions that relate to the formal features of things, people and society. But it should not be interpreted singularly as appearances, signs or images. Surface also denotes a sense of lack of depth, a shallowness and superficiality. The emphasis on surfaces in contemporary American culture suggests an aesthetic transformation that symbolizes the shift of cultural and social values. The ascending status of surfaces in social life also indicates an inversion of traditional values (which often relate to the culture of the country) that are grounded in notions of essence, depth, and substance, by a reformulated understanding of culture that emphasizes appearances, signs and images (often associated with a late capitalist society). Such a surface-driven value system is closely connected with late-capitalist conditions, consumerism and urbanism. Narrative forms and styles—the very surfaces of literature—thus become especially relevant in this context.

The changes in narrative surfaces have been recognized by critics such as James Annesley. He perceives the importance of the formal changes of these novels and regards them as the inflexions of social change. Identifying the unifying characteristics of such “brat-pack” writers as McInerney, Ellis, and Tama Janowitz, as well as many other contemporary American writers including Donna Tartt, Susanna Moore, Douglas Coupland, Sapphire, Katherine Texier, Mark Leyner, Ray Shell and Evelyn Lau, Annesley argues

that “stories of indolence, extremism and marginality” have become the “staple elements” in these novels (*Blank Fictions* 2). Favouring the term “blank fiction”, he describes the narrative changes that are informed by social and cultural transformations in New York City. For Annesley, “blank fiction” has placed a:

relentless emphasis on brand names, popular culture and commodities, coupled with [...] detailed descriptions of consumerism, the reifications of violence, decadence and extreme sexuality (*Blank Fictions* 136).

Annesley reveals the dynamic of blank fiction to be tied to the dominant consumer culture of 1980s New York. At the centre of Annesley’s argument is a belief that “a particular novel’s style, structure and language can be seen to bear the marks of its context” (*Blank Fictions* 6). He uses Valentin Vološinov’s words to suggest that “the focus on these formal concerns provides, [...] an understanding of the connections between social life and literature and offers an insight into the mechanisms through which ‘existence gets into the sign’” (qtd. in *Blank Fictions* 6). Annesley’s concern with the formal features of “blank fiction” writers serves as my point of departure in this section. The following analyses of McInerney’s and Ellis’s novels will demonstrate that both authors explore and experiment with narrative form in order to achieve a meaningful critique of contemporary New York culture. Their narrative forms not only bear the marks of their time, but serve as important and productive representations through which we can understand New York City in the 1980s.

Jay McInerney

In *Bright Lights*, McInerney negotiates, probably as skilfully as any writer of his time, the tensions and contradictions of a New York City that is plagued by drug abuse, decadence and promiscuity. Building upon his early success with *Bright Lights*, this “wunderkind” author has produced a series of novels, including *Story of My Life*, *Brightness Falls* (1992) and *The Good Life* (2006). These novels record different social influences that affect New York City. They also demonstrate McInerney’s shifting narrative and stylistic techniques over time. Most typically, McInerney’s two early novels *Bright Lights* and *Story of My Life* became almost synonymous with 1980s New York yuppie culture. Both novels make an impression upon the reader with their heavy references to the social settings of the 1980s and their highly experimental narrative forms. They offer iconic literary representations of 1980s New York: not only do they reveal the spirit of the time but they also evidence a cultural shift that accentuates experimentation and youth experience.

Bright Lights is one of the few novels written in English that employs a second-person narrative voice. The story starts with a nameless protagonist’s degenerate life in a nightclub. Working as a fact-checker for a prestigious magazine—an experience shared by McInerney in real life—the protagonist’s boss is increasingly unhappy with his work. This is because the nameless hero is trapped in the urban allure of bright lights and the pain of his marital failure. His wife, Amanda, a fashion model, has left him for a photographer. This induces his degeneration into a self-indulgent lifestyle of excessive drink, drugs and random sex. However, Amanda’s image haunts the protagonist. And

his marital failure is implicitly associated with his mother's death, complicating the protagonist's personal trauma.

McInerney's portrait of the hedonistic lifestyles of his protagonists leads the reader into a world of party-going, cocaine-taking, clubbing, casual sex, avoidance of responsibility, and full-time self-indulgence in early 1980s New York. McInerney seeks to evoke this lifestyle through narrative technique, rather than conducting an exposé or moralistic critique. From time to time the reader discerns the trauma that afflicts the novels' main characters but McInerney prevents us from easily penetrating the surface of these metropolitan individuals as both narratives hold us at a distance until the end of *Bright Lights* and *Story of My Life*. In this sense, in order to reach an understanding of these protagonists' metropolitan dilemmas we must linger on McInerney's textual surface.

Firstly, the narrative voice in both novels is significant. *Bright Lights* starts with an anonymous "you". Strangely, this nameless "you" that McInerney boldly uses all the way through his novel does not strain the reader. Instead, it captures our attention by a casual, approachable and occasionally languid voice, as if a friendly dialogue is being conducted between the narrator and the reader. The second-person narrative is powered by a kind of interactive initiative. It invites complicity from the reader to construct its story-telling. The reader can easily slip into the protagonist's skin to experience his life. "You" plays an intricate role in relating the narrator constantly to the protagonist, as well as to the implied author. It is an internal voice that connects the reader with the narrator and the author. Mary Frances Hopkins and Leon Perkins argue that "the narrative 'you'" is "'an actant by definition' and therefore

‘internal to the story’” (qtd in Fludernik 4). This suggests that the narrator could be speaking to himself, as if in a monologue, which endows the novel with a certain heightened subjectivity. The fact that it is often difficult to fix the identity of “you” to any one role within a narrator-protagonist-reader relationship imparts to “you” a shifting quality in terms of its addressee. “You” may point to the narrator in an act of self-address; it may point to a particular character; it may also point to the reader. The uncertainty of “you” gives the narrator multiple identities through which he shares the experience with the protagonist while speaking, in a semi-omniscient manner, over the protagonist. And the shifting quality of “you”, on the other hand, keeps the reader from going further into the inner mind of McInerney’s protagonist as if his voice is able to keep us on the surface of the narration.

These features of the second-person narrative can be better understood when compared with the first- and the third-person narrative voices. When compared with the first-person narrative, the second-person narrative lacks the autobiographical quality embedded in “I”, but it retains a certain self-referencing mechanism, making it highly subjective too. When compared with the third-person narrative, the second-person narrative relies on the collaboration between narrator, protagonist and reader to consummate its story-telling, rather than employing the narrator as sole story-teller. In other words, the second-person narrative dissolves the gap between the author, the protagonist, and the narrator, therefore making the story-telling simultaneously more interactive, uncertain and subjective. In McInerney’s elaborate use of the second-person narrative voice, the formal features of “you” prove to be closely associated with the theme of the story:

You spot a girl at the edge of the dance floor who looks like your last chance for earthly salvation. You know for a fact that if you go out into the morning alone, without even your sunglasses—which you have neglected to bring, because who, after all, plans on these travesties?—the harsh, angling light will turn you to flesh and bone. Mortality will pierce you through the retina. But there she is in her pegged pants, a king of doo-wop Retro ponytail pulled off to the side, as eligible a candidate as you are likely to find this late in the game. The sexual equivalent of fast food (*BLBC* 6).

Here, the voice does not split until the parenthetical interruption: “which you have neglected to bring, because who, after all, plans on these travesties?” Such a split shows that the narrative voice speaks to the reader in a semi-omniscient manner somehow above or beyond the protagonist, though partly to the protagonist as well. The question suggestively points at a slight tone of critique towards the protagonist’s forgetfulness. However, it serves more directly as the protagonist’s own monologue. It leaves an impression that the voice of the protagonist, forged by this narrator-protagonist relationship, has an embedded conflict because “you” makes the narrator’s critique more of a glib self-mockery. This internal conflict of “you” stops the mockery at the surface, without constituting any further exploration into the protagonist’s real opinions. In this sense, the formal lack of depth becomes a distinctive feature of the second-person narrative. And it resonates well with the superficiality of the 1980s yuppie lifestyle in New York. The blasé sense of the critique embedded in “you” makes the narrative form consistent with the thematic blankness of McInerney’s story.

Moreover, the multiple denotations of “you” also suggest a mirroring effect of the narrative voice and imply a sense of narcissism. The second-person narrator talks as if he is having a conversation with his own reflection in the mirror. Seeing one’s reflection and describing it often means that the

depiction of the reflection takes on a descriptive, rather than an analytical, nature. McInerney's description of yuppies' experimentations with drugs, sex, and their decadent lifestyles partially turn his story into a kind of high journalism; as if he is reporting 1980s New York life without too much comment. And there is a sense that McInerney's decision to describe what is happening outweighs the need to go into depth about it. This, to a certain extent, explains the tendencies and changes of New York culture at a time when sub-cultures played an increasingly significant role in American life. The multifarious spectacles of sub-cultural manifestations typically represented by a decadent yuppie lifestyle have obviously dominated the fictions of McInerney and other "Blank Generation" authors. In this sense, the mirroring effect of "you" facilitates the realistic approach adopted by McInerney and other Blank Fiction writers to record 1980s New York, with its social and cultural changes.

Interestingly, by investigating the details of this particular passage more closely we can posit that the superficiality within McInerney's narrative voice is also a quality that can be associated with the city lifestyle represented by the author. The manner in which the protagonist looks at the girl—"spotting" her—is suggestive of hunting game in a forest rather than seeking a real engagement with another person. Suggestively, the sexual relationship between the protagonist and the "girl" stops at a superficial level, although what they are going to do relates to the most private and profound human interaction. This lack of depth in human relationships is a typical feature of urban life that has been recognized by earlier urban scholars. Urban culture has traditionally been regarded as "anonymous, unfriendly and superficial" when compared

with the culture of non-urban or countryside communities in the context of modernity (Stevenson 13). However, in an excessively commodified urban culture, there is a further superficial tendency in interpersonal relationships. As McInerney describes it, in Manhattan the human relationship is more defined by “fast food” culture. The “fast food” description indicates a mindset of urban consumerism that seeks speed and efficiency, rather than substantial or lasting connection. Therefore to compare sex with the girl to “fast food” not only indicates the objectification of a woman, and of a sexual relationship, but a heightened and intensified objectification of human beings and human relationships in general. Although to objectify women is not solely a postmodern phenomenon, it is the excessive consumerism in New York City that precipitates such behaviour and renders sex so shallow.

Another relevant reading of the passage implies the influence of mass-media and popular culture in McInerney’s description. The use of “sunglasses”, “flesh and bones”, “angling light”, “mortality” and “retina” associate the imagery of the protagonist with that of a vampire. McInerney’s character lives in a nocturnal world where the images of horror, violence, sex and brutality are infiltrating every aspect of urban life through mass media. This can be seen in the cinematic and televisual preoccupations of 1970s and 1980s America. America’s screens during this period were littered with images of violence, sex, decadence and brutality and often these images were closely associated with countercultural punks, and greedy yuppies. Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), David Cronenberg’s *Shivers* (1975), John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978) and Sean Cunningham’s *Friday the 13th* (1980)

all expressively delivered a sense of horror and darkness. Among these grotesque images and representations of violence, the image of the vampire was particularly relevant to yuppies. For example, in Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983) and Robert Bierman's *Vampire's Kiss* (1988), the debauched life of New York yuppies foregrounds vampiric killings and brutality. As William Day argues, "[t]he vampire makes a perfect symbol for the empty inner life of the soulless yuppie of the late twentieth century" (96-97). Day identifies the shared motif between *Vampire's Kiss* and that of McInerney's *Bright Lights* and Ellis's *American Psycho*. His analysis shows the relevance of the cultural context of 1980s New York to McInerney's text. In this light, McInerney's vampiric flavouring of his protagonist's image can be regarded as being deeply situated within an urban environment infiltrated by mass media and popular culture. In such an urban environment, the protagonist's sense of loss should not be viewed solely in the context of his personal trauma, but, rather, it should be read in conjunction with the confluence of a highly influential consumer culture and media culture. In order to understand this point, it is necessary to describe the protagonist's personal trauma first.

In *Bright Lights*, the protagonist is deeply depressed by his wife's abandonment. Such a plot is intertwined with brief and scattered descriptions of his mother. However, it is only at the end of the novel that the reader is given more detailed information as to how the protagonist has experienced the painful death of his ailing mother. The revelation of the protagonist's family traumas—his failed marriage and the death of his mother—is identified by critics as one of the central motifs of McInerney's novels. As Kenneth Millard argues: "childhood trauma and adult recovery are [...] central" to Jay

McInerney's *Bright Lights* (30). Millard's analyses of Amanda and of the protagonist's familial relationships are pertinent to show the central position of family traumas in McInerney's text. In this sense, the protagonist's personal trauma also has an implicit connection with the imagery of the vampire. Vampiric representations are often associated with the gothic tendencies in late twentieth-century American culture. As Robert Martin and Eric Savoy suggest in their study of the American gothic tradition, "[t]he failure of repression and forgetting—a failure upon which the entire tradition of the gothic in America is predicated—will be complete in those conscious eyes" (4). They argue that there is a paradoxical relationship between the gothic and representations of trauma since various kinds of trauma "constitute both a return and a loss" (11).

However, such a reading of family trauma in McInerney's novels is important but not adequate. Millard further situates the characters' traumas within the social context of New York, arguing that *Bright Lights* "places the disintegration of the family in a broader context of cultural degeneracy and decline" (32). Millard's interpretation has begun to show the cultural construction of the protagonist's trauma here. However, it seems an oversimplification to claim that the protagonist's sense of loss is mainly caused by his family's disintegration. It cannot explain, for example, why the author chooses to situate the protagonist's family trauma within the hedonistic, self-indulgent lifestyle of New York yuppies and why, despite such indulgence and gratification, the protagonist's overriding experience is a feeling of disorientation (at the end of the novel, there is a strong sense of lingering loss that can be felt from the protagonist.) It also cannot explain why the author resorts to giving the cultural context of New York such prominence in his

novel that his account of the protagonist's personal trauma assumes only a very small part of the novel's action.

To answer these questions, we need to return to the question of highly commodified and mediated urban realities. The impression of an urban life infiltrated by a media culture filled with images of brutality and sexuality is reinforced by the news titles of the *New York Post* represented in the novel:

The *Post* is the most shameful of your several addictions. You hate to support this kind of trash with your thirty cents, but you are a secret fan of Killer Bees, Hero Cops, Sex Fiends, Lottery Winners, Teenage Terrorists, Liz Taylor, Tough Tots, Sicko Creeps, Living Nightmares, Life on Other Planets, Spontaneous Human Combustion, Miracle Diets and Coma Babies (*BLBC* 11).

The dominance of violent images and signs accentuate the mass media's shaping of reality in postmodern New York. McInerney's protagonist is trapped in a particular space and time—1980s New York City where individual experience is constructed through the multiple influences of personal experience, consumer culture, media culture, popular culture and drug culture. The complicity of these influences blurs the individual's understanding of the constructed and the actual, of reality and fantasy. For the author, this cultural constitution must share the blame for the protagonist's sense of loss. And the protagonist's failure to separate reality from illusion, therefore, cannot simply be regarded as a post-traumatic symptom due to his marital break-up and the loss of his mother. It is the context of contemporary New York culture that complicates the post-traumatic healing process and pushes the protagonist to a further sense of emptiness and nihilism. Urban culture explains, at least partially, the disintegration of the protagonist's marriage (in the plot, the protagonist's wife leaves him for a photographer, suggesting a marriage that is

established in surfaces). The urban environment is also what causes him predominantly to lead an indulgent, self-destructive lifestyle. His sense of disorientation is therefore closely associated with, if not a direct consequence of, the perceived cultural degeneration of New York City in the 1980s.

In comparison, in *Story of My Life* McInerney offers another experimental narrative voice: a female voice punctuated by bits and pieces of vernacular. It is often deemed a challenge for a male writer to write from the perspective of a woman, yet McInerney successfully forges a believable female narrative voice and Alison Poole, the protagonist, is a highly plausible character. In the novel, Alison is a twenty-year-old girl who leads us through a few weeks in 1987. Living in Manhattan, she takes drugs, drinks, smokes, and sleeps with different men. Neglected by her divorced parents and in constant competition with her sisters for the love of her parents, Alison's troubled family relationship underpins her wanton lifestyle in New York. Occasionally, we can feel the traumatic impact of her family upon her own sense of self. However, Alison's family are frequently not articulated clearly enough for the reader to understand what has actually happened. While Alison sleepwalks her life away, she does have some pertinent observations about life and culture. And as the novel ends, the reader is told "I'd love to think that ninety percent of it was just dreaming" (188). This makes one wonder whether Alison's account of her "story of life" is trustworthy or not.

To make a comparison, both novels strike the reader as expressing a similar preoccupation with the theme of trauma. The family traumas of both novels' protagonists are revealed in a repressed, understated manner, frequently confusing the reader with unclear descriptions. This makes these

accounts of trauma less reliable since both protagonists are often under the influence of drugs and find it difficult to distinguish reality from illusion. Such an arrangement also begs the question as to why McInerney chooses the degenerated lifestyle of Alison as the main theme of the novel, instead of her family trauma.

Meanwhile, a prominent feature of the female narrative voice in *Story of My Life* is its pressured pace and tempo. This can be revealed through a conversation between Alison and her father:

That night my old man finally calls. I'm like, I must be dreaming. Pissed at you, I go, when he asks how I am. I'm sorry, honey, he says, about the tuition. I screwed up. You're goddamn right you did, I say. Oh, baby, he goes, I'm a mess. You're telling me, I go. He says, she left me. Don't come crying to me about what's-her-name, I say. Then he starts to whine and I go, when are you going to grow up, for Christ's sake? (McInerney, *SML* 14).

The whole dialogue appears in the text without quotation marks as if it is a run-on conversation, conferring the responsibility of distinguishing between the two speakers to the reader. This makes the narrative echo the tension between Alison and her father, both of whom abnegate emotional responsibility to each other. The relaying of the dialogue is conducted in an uninterrupted, fast-paced manner, as suggested by the absence of inverted commas. The pressure of this narrative tone can easily be felt, as if the reader is being pushed all the way to the end of the conversation. The tempo of the narrative is an indication of the tempo of life in New York City. Specifically, the increasingly quickened tone is associated with the growing tensions experienced by the protagonist, whose chaotic life is running at a freewheeling speed and is almost out of control. Such a freewheeling speed is shaped by the pervasive hedonism and excessive consumerism that McInerney suggests define 1980s New York. This

impression can be gleaned through Alison's daily routine of dancing classes, tanning, shopping, clubbing and excessive sex with different men. While one would argue that McInerney uses the "Big City" of New York as a place for his protagonists to escape from their personal traumas, it can equally be argued that the protagonist's plunge into the hedonistic city does not generate any real consolation. The hedonism of the city, underlined by excessive forms of commodification, appears hand in hand with nihilism. The painful revelation of Alison's childhood trauma only briefly at the end of the novel rehearses the dominant impact of excessive consumerism on individuals. McInerney's contrast between the lengthy description of a debauched city life and a brief account of the protagonist's personal trauma stresses, essentially, that the city lifestyle is to share the blame for his protagonist's fundamental disorientation.

Moreover, the fact that the whole novel is told in the present tense enhances the pace of the narrative. In contradistinction to conventionally retrospective story-telling, *Story of My Life* is recounted in the present tense. This is also the case with *Bright Lights*. The use of the present tense lends the narration a sense of synchronicity—as if the author is reporting events in the format of a news program. This further strengthens the impression of McInerney's writing as a form of high journalism. By synchronizing the protagonist's life with the reader's reading experience through his use of the present tense, McInerney has mediated a sense of immediacy and urgency through this narrative strategy. Philip Pullman has made some pertinent observations concerning the problematic consequences of utilising the present-tense narrative. He argues that it "feel[s] claustrophobic, always pressed up against the immediate" (15). Yet it is exactly this "claustrophobic" and

“pressed up” feeling that McInerney pursues. For the author, the present tense fits well with the protagonists’ inner tension, as well as the tension of an urban lifestyle.

The present tense often registers a strong sense of immediacy and ongoingness, which draws the reader’s attention to what is happening now. By concentrating the reader’s attention on the present, McInerney successfully achieves an overwhelming effect by suddenly revealing Alison’s childhood trauma. The dominance of the present tense contrasts the sudden revelation of her past trauma, accentuating a sense of unexpectedness. In addition, the lengthy account of Alison’s indulgent life in New York can be regarded as “a strategy of escape, repression, and sublimation” (Abádi-Nagy 246) to avoid the confrontation with her trauma. In this sense, the fast-paced, on-going nature of the present tense suppresses the traumatic memory of McInerney’s protagonist as she tries to delay her inevitable pain. Therefore a dramatic effect is achieved when Alison’s trauma is suddenly revealed at the end of the story. Such a narrative strategy implicitly draws on Hemingway’s iceberg theory in the sense that the power of the drama is established by repressing the protagonist’s family trauma for most of the account before its sudden, final revelation.³¹

Although McInerney does indicate a causal relationship between the protagonists’ disorientation and their family problems through this narrative strategy of delayed traumatic revelation, this reading, as I argued earlier, offers far too simplistic an explanation to account for Alison’s lengthy narrative of decadence, drug addiction, and abnegation of responsibility. The urban

³¹ The Iceberg Theory is a term used to describe the style of writing of American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). According to this theory, the meaning of a piece of writing is not immediately evident, because the central message of the story lies below the surface, just as of the majority of the mass of a real iceberg similarly lies beneath the surface of the sea.

context—1980s New York—provides the key explanation here. Alison lives in a world where a superficial lifestyle composed primarily of tanning, shopping and having casual sex, is established through patterns of consumption. In reality, professions that were structured by the consumption of surfaces became increasingly predominant in 1980s New York. An increasing emphasis was placed on surfaces in the consumer culture—an impression that is enhanced by Alison's dream to become an actress. For Alison, to consume appearances, signs and images becomes a vital means through which to distinguish herself from others and establish her identity, as well as her social status.

Another dimension created by employing the present tense in narrative is its purposeful omission of the past and future. Neglecting the past can be regarded as a means of repression. In the case of the protagonist, such a repression is necessary to delay the impact of trauma. Neglecting the future, on the other hand, helps to suspend any expectations on the reader's part. The speculation about what will happen becomes less important than what is happening in the narrative right now. Therefore the focus on the present also suggests a *carpe diem* mentality of the characters in McInerney's novels, which relates to the yuppie lifestyle and the cultural shift in New York during the 1980s. Underlining such a cultural shift was a change in social values that emphasized experimentation, entertainment and surfaces. Traditional work ethics were replaced by personal enjoyment and satisfaction. Youth became a distinct phase of life in which people were encouraged to experiment and explore their personal, physical and emotional boundaries. This cultural tendency had begun to take shape in America and other major developed countries in the 1950s-60s, but it has become more overt and obvious in late-

capitalist countries since the 1980s. At present, for example, drug culture has become more accepted among young people and in some cases has been legalized in major developed countries (for example, in Holland, cannabis is legalized and can be purchased at coffee shops).

At the same time, the dominance of the present tense in McInerney's novels also suggests a lack of temporal variation. The monotony of one singular temporal dimension makes the narrative one-dimensional and flat, therefore lacking the inflections that generate narrative depth. This indicates the fundamental nature of the contemporary culture in 1980s New York. Whether it is the suffocating reality his nameless protagonist tries to escape by plunging into excessive drinking, drug-taking and random sex in *Bright Lights*, or the escapism Alison demonstrates by living a superficial life in *Story of My Life*, the city fails to provide any genuine emotional comfort for McInerney's protagonists. What it offers, according to the author's depiction, is nihilism instead of real consolation.

It is also interesting to note that the novel is narrated in a female voice framed by a male writer with significant use of the vernacular, mingled with vulgarity. Alison may usefully be understood as a metropolitan *flâneuse* through whom we can glimpse the generic lifestyle of a financially privileged metropolitan individual in 1980s New York. Relying on intermittent financial support from her father and money from her friends she is, first and foremost, a consumer in modern-day New York. Alison allows us to see the city as Walter Benjamin perceives the Arcade in nineteenth-century Paris: as a marketplace where crowds mingle, but also a vehicle—through the mesmerizing power of commodities—of social control (30-46). In this sense, Alison's significance as

a character lies in her strength as a consumer. Her account of life in New York City provides a lens into the surface quality of the metropolitan lifestyle:

After class I stop off to tan. Work on that golden brown look that makes the boys so hungry. Get home feeling great, pick up the mail, June Vogue plus postcard from an old flame who's in California now, wants me to move out there. "Remember that bench in Riverside Park? Love, Trip." Trip's all right. I don't know, some girls get love letters, me, I get lust postcards (McInerney, *SML* 114).

Here, tanning herself and reading Vogue implies fashion's dominating power in shaping consumption patterns in 1980s New York. Alison lives in a city where fashion becomes the vital fabric of a woman's life and dressing up is crucial for judging an individual's social status. In terms of fashion, surfaces are not merely a formal decoration for social life; they become the content of social life. As I will argue later, this is a point that is articulated even more overtly in Bushnell's *Sex and the City*. For Alison, in this instance her image, or rather her surface, has become something that needs to be "worked on". Such a description indicates an interesting twist on a traditional work ethic that champions the distinction between work time and leisure time. The importance of work in contemporary capitalist cities has been increasingly overshadowed by the power of consumption. This is a point that has been recognized by many critics. Claus Offe, for one, claims that "work" is no longer a "key sociological category" (133). "Work", he argues, no longer has "a relatively privileged power to determine social consciousness and action" (133). In Alison's case, she becomes "the fetish character of the commodity" (Adorno 191) because her act of tanning sabotages the distinction between work and leisure in the sense that tanning is part of her "work" as an actress. Whilst tanning might more likely be considered by Adorno to be a physically unpleasant experience, its

association with consumer culture indicates the ascending importance of surfaces and images in contemporary social life.

The pursuit of fashion and bodily aesthetics is not exclusively a metropolitan phenomenon, but its origin is embedded in the shopping malls and beauty salons first emergent in metropolitan areas. And the rapid rise of the fashion industry in New York took place at a time when manufacturing industries were being replaced by service and consumer-oriented industries. The rise of a service industry that focused on design, representation, appearance and image underlined the industrial transformation happening in New York and in the developed world more generally in the late 1970s and 1980s. Sharon Zukin observes in her *The Cultures of Cities* (1995) that “in the 1970s and 1980s, the symbolic economy rose to prominence against a background of industrial decline and financial speculation” (8). Social studies of the time also draw attention to the rise of a distinct ‘yuppie’ culture accompanied by occupational transformations (Longhurst and Savage 282). These transformations in industrial and professional areas of experience symbolised the entrance of images, signs and appearances into the economic realm and their developments have been determined by the subsequent aesthetic choices played out in contemporary culture. The role of the mass media therefore became decisive in cultivating and shaping people’s aesthetic tastes. In this urban environment infiltrated by mass media, the economy of surfaces began to demonstrate its commanding power.

At the same time, changes in the nature of consumption indicated the growing role of culture in defining consumption patterns in cities. The transformation from traditional consumption patterns that emphasized the

function and utility of commodities to new consumption patterns determined by brands, marketed images and aesthetic choices again reveals how changes in the cultural domain can affect a consumer market. In this post-industrial context, surfaces became a concept capable of conjoining the influences of mass media, consumerism, commodity fetishism, urbanism and society's changing aesthetics in the contemporary period. Importantly, the notion of surface also strongly echoes Guy Debord's concept of the "spectacle". Debord uses the word "spectacle" to define the systematic features and manifestations of a highly mediated society determined by capitalist modes of production. In a narrow sense, "spectacle" specifically points to the images, signs and appearances that enter into the economic realm of a capitalist system and command their "totalitarian rule" (*The Society* 19). For Debord, the commanding power of the spectacle generates a 'permanent opium war' (*The Society* 30). David Thorns unpacks the implication of such an "opium war", recognizing that:

[t]he narcotics [...] are commodified forms of leisure and entertainment which, while they seem to meet peoples' needs and satisfy them, are in fact a new form of deprivation which take us from Marx's *being into having* to Debord's *having into appearing*. Here, image takes precedence over material objects and 'the universalisation of the commodity form is to be seen as the reduction of reality to appearance, its subsumption of commodity form, its subsequent *commodification*' (145 emphasis in original).

Thorns' analysis has revealed the essential nature of the contemporary cultural shift in New York. It is a cultural shift that is dominated by commodified surfaces. These surfaces are able to enter every realm of social life and exercise their commanding power through the proliferation of mass media. Here, tanning appears as what Thorns calls one of several "commodified forms of

leisure". By suggesting the purpose of Alison's tanning is to attract "the boys", McInerney once again dehumanizes his protagonist by treating Alison's body as a commodity. He reinforces such an impression by suggesting that through enhancing the "commodity's" appearance, its "price" will be increased as it makes "the boys so hungry". Accompanying such a tendency to dehumanize human bodies and commodify human appearances (as exemplified in the modelling and advertising industries) is a tendency to reduce the emotional depth of human relationships. The analogy of "lust postcards" echoes McInerney's reference to "the sexual equivalent of fast food" in *Bright Lights* (6). The expression of love has been reduced to an unromantic, simplified exchange of lusts. Postcards replace letters. And lust replaces love. There is a sense of the hollowing out of any emotional depth between individuals. Human emotions are reduced to a mere exchange of visible commodities. Such a description enhances the impression that surfaces form a significant part, if not the entirety, of social life.

This contextual reading justifies McInerney's attention to the formal aspects of city life and his narrative's lack of depth. In New York City in the 1980s, consumption and consumption-generated services and products began to undermine the importance of production and became part of the determining forces of social class and stratification. The relative decline of work, and therefore production (in comparison to consumption), in determining social class in this period is a point made by many sociologists. Rosemary Crompton, for one, argues that "'consumption process[es]' are in the process of becoming, or have become, more important than production (or 'class') processes in shaping social identities and explaining social behaviour" (113). The way in

which McInerney's Alison consumes thus determines who she is. And the increasing importance of tanning as a fashionable, expensive consumer activity in 1980s New York can be regarded as a sign of the growing reign of consumption in social life.

Alison's identity as a female consumer here also shows a gendered aspect of consumption. McInerney's decision to construct Alison as a female consumer in 1980s New York echoes Zukin's observation in *Point of Purchase* (2004) that "the public sphere of consumption has mainly been constructed by, and for, women [...] women have also played key productive roles in mass consumption" (33). Alison's consumer image endorses the social tendency of women to become the main agents of urban consumer culture in 1980s New York. In reality, women were the main targets of advertisements and magazines that encouraged consumption. Ellen McCracken's study of American women's magazines in the 1980s shows that in 1982, an average issue of *Good Housekeeping* brought in over nine million dollars through advertising revenues. A one-page advertisement in the same magazine sold for much less but still cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per advertisement (302-04). These women's magazines therefore constructed "an illusory, distorted picture of the world" (McCracken 68). Not only were they successful at evoking the desires of their women readers, but through advertising such magazines quickly channelled these desires into a persuasive invitation to purchase and consume.

It is within these particular social conditions that McInerney's choice of theme, language and style become especially relevant. His narrative and characters have appropriately captured the changes of New York in the 1980s

by underlining the changed cultural, behavioural, consuming and linguistic codes. Not only was the nature of consumption changed (from consuming signifiers to signs), but also the urban setting changed too. It transformed New York into a city of shopping malls, dominated by surfaces that were assisted by mass media advertising, and it coerced New Yorkers into becoming consumers of one type or another.

So far, I have investigated the shared narrative strategies employed in McInerney's two early novels. Both of these narrative strategies conclude with a sudden emotional revelation of the protagonist's traumatic experience. Moreover, the narrative voices in both novels are experimental and lack depth. In *Bright Lights*, the emotional account of the mother's death at the end of the novel forms a strong contrast to the previously indifferent, detached description of the protagonist's indulgent life in Manhattan. The novel's preoccupation with the superficial lifestyle of its protagonist reveals itself as a strategy to inform the reader of the social conditions that cause his family's disintegration and personal trauma. But, crucially, this narrative strategy also offers an explanation to account for the protagonist's indulgent lifestyle and fundamental disorientation.

In a similar, but more indirect, way *Story of My Life* concludes with Alison's call to her father, reminding him of what he has done to her (in her account there is an implication that her father abused her when she was young). The emotional, intense revelation of her past trauma is quite different in style from the overall tone of the novel. It serves as a stark contrast to the unfeeling tone consistently expressed in the text's narrative voice. Although the reader is often overwhelmed by such a sudden change in narrative tone towards the end

of a novel, McInerney's narrative twist here throws light on Alison's idle and self-destructive life-style. The fast-paced, chaotic, even hysterical narrative voice can be understood as reflecting her equally chaotic and confused mind. And, as it is implied in the novel, this is caused both by Alison's past trauma as well as New York's preoccupation with excessive consumerism.

Bret Easton Ellis

In *American Psycho*, this preoccupation with surfaces has developed to the point where it takes an extreme form. The story follows a promising young Wall Street banker, Patrick Bateman, through his daily routine in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of his days are filled with parties, dating, dining out, renting videotapes, and buying the very best consumer products. Filthy rich, Patrick is at the pinnacle of his social power in a New York that is depicted as primarily money-grabbing. But when the story enters the second third of the book, it begins to show a different side to Patrick's character as he tortures and kills women, gays and homeless people. Ellis successfully captures the evil excesses of the period through alternating his narrative lens between conspicuous lunches at trendy Manhattan restaurants and nauseating scenes of murder and mayhem. He depicts Patrick as being caught between an excessively commodified culture that turns him into an unfeeling zombie, on the one hand, and his unstoppable urge to kill, on the other, which increasingly becomes his only means to feel and lay claim to his own existence.

What immediately distinguishes *American Psycho* from other blank fictions is its excessively commodified language and graphic depiction of

violence. Resisting any natural or humanistic depiction, Ellis's narrative voice strikes the reader as mechanically commodified. It is tinged with a strong sense of dehumanisation even though Ellis uses the first person narrative voice. In the second chapter, for example, Ellis uses the entire chapter to detail the settings of Patrick Bateman's flat and the various items he uses each morning:

After I change into Ralph Lauren monogrammed boxer shorts and a Fair Isle sweater and slide into silk polka-dot Enrico Hidolin slippers I tie a plastic ice pack around my face and commence with the morning's stretching exercises. [. . .] Then I use the Probright tooth polisher and next the Interplak tooth polisher (this in addition to the toothbrush) which has a speed of 4200 rpm and reverses direction forty-six times per second (25).

Instead of describing the commodities in generic terms, Ellis laboriously and purposefully uses brand names as his reference point. Here, his narrative creates a sense of boredom and redundancy through a litany of brand names, accompanied by the marketing jargon found in the manuals for these products. Rather than being described vividly, these commodities are listed in a flat and impersonal tone. The narrator consumes these objects in such an unfeeling manner that he fails to inform the reader of any gratification or enjoyment. Or rather, Patrick's gratification is entirely established on displaying these brand names. According to Annesley, Patrick lives in a time where "personal wealth and personal identity is one and same thing" (*Blank Fictions* 14). It is in this context of late-capitalist New York that what one consumes determines who one is and how one feels. Individuals are determined and identified first and foremost by their external possessions, instead of their inherent qualities. Such an environment is shown through the object-laden depiction in Ellis's book. Importantly, Patrick's materialistic ambition is augmented by a media culture that champions surfaces. In such a media culture, brands, images and signs are

highly celebrated and they began to determine the choices of New York consumers like Patrick Bateman. In *Culture in an Age of Money* (1990) Josephine Hendin argues that:

This 1980 fiction discloses a fascination for advertising culture most simply in the use of brand names in character definition [...]. In embracing commercial culture, 1980s fiction focuses on both the illusions it sustains and the manipulative power of its technique (233).

The advertising culture—one that accentuates brands, images and signs—largely shifts the nature and patterns of mass consumption in an excessively commodified age. Patrick’s obsession with brands, fashion and video tapes is symptomatic of such a culture. In this highly commodified culture, as it is incessantly filtered through the mass media, brand names represent concrete artefacts, symbols replace real referents, and “images take the place of reality” (Claes Oldenberg qtd. in Young and Caveney 21). By giving such an unrelenting and monotonous account, Ellis suggests that in an excessively commodified society commodities are not differentiated from each other by their inherent attributes but, rather, by such external features as their appearance. This also holds true for the human beings occupying this highly mediated landscape. The proliferation of media culture makes individuals preoccupied, indeed bombarded, by excessive information and images. According to Baudrillard, human beings increasingly live in “a world of proliferating information and shrinking sense” (qtd. in Rose 27). The obsession with surfaces not only makes surface a defining feature of the individual, but it also results in an increasingly shallow set of human relationships. The “shrinking sense”, or the hollowing out of any human emotions, is therefore an

undesired side-effect of the proliferation of mass media in such a highly commodified society.

Ellis's extremely commodified language is considered by many critics to be associated with the rampant consumerism and advertising culture during the 1980s and 1990s in New York following Reaganism. Despite the controversies that *American Psycho* caused as a result of its graphic description of violence, as well as its atonal, lifeless depiction of the superficial living represented by yuppies in 1980s New York, there have been occasional critics who look beyond these banalities to see the value of Ellis's book. Normal Mailer, for example, regards the book as a "crystallization of such horror" of the "disgusting" eighties (qtd. in Young and Caveney 86). Mim Udovitch, one of the few contemporary critics who noticed Ellis's literary strategies of overt commodification, argues that it is an "anti-novel, with all the attendant no-frills—flat characters, monotonously detailed surface description, no plot to speak of and endless repetitions" (qtd. in Young and Caveney 87). Such a reading of *American Psycho*, in contradistinction to the severe censure it widely received, was brave at the time of the novel's publication. It was not until some years later that *American Psycho* was eventually taken seriously by critics. Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney are perhaps the key critics who read *American Psycho* in a less moralistic manner. They choose to situate it within the context of American culture in the 1980s. Young claims that "*American Psycho* is of course a classic of the 1980s. In a sense it *is* the 1980s" (88 emphasis in original). In contextualising the novel, Young illuminates a new perspective which allows us to take the apparently superficial qualities of Ellis's text seriously. Following that, Annesley strengthens Young's

interpretation by further unpacking Ellis's commodified narrative and associating his monotonous style with the overt violence which develops in the novel from simple acts of violence to torture, rape, mutilation, cannibalism and necrophilia. He argues that "[t]he gruesome scenes and violent images offered in his narrative are not shocking deviations from the mainstream, but elements that are, in fact, characteristic of it" (*Blank Fictions* 12). In *Blank Fictions*, Annesley proves his point by citing a series of movies hitting American screens in the 1980s and 1990s that contained graphic levels of violence. He believes that *American Psycho* is a satire of a grotesque version of excessive consumerism and media culture in New York, and in America in general.

However, one relevant reading which is largely overlooked is Ellis's own emotional state as an author, and the influences on him during his writing of *American Psycho*. Ellis once said that he was having a difficult time with his father whilst writing the book.³² This troubled filial relationship is one crucial influence throughout the author's literary career, which has, arguably, unavoidably tainted his writing, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, Ellis dedicated his semi-autobiographical novel *Lunar Park* to his alcoholic and abusive father, Robert Ellis. In an early interview Ellis even admitted that Patrick Bateman was based on his father by referring to him as "a tough case" who caused Ellis "a lot of damage" when he was growing up (Ellis, interview *Random House*). But in a 2010 interview, he changed this position by saying that "Patrick Bateman was about me. I didn't want to finally own up to the responsibility of being Patrick Bateman, so I laid it on my father, I laid it on Wall Street..." He continued to say that the book had been "about

³² Ellis made this statement during an interview with Dr. Nick Heffernan at the Broadway Cinema, Nottingham, U.K. on 18 July, 2010. The author of the dissertation was in the audience.

me at the time, and I wrote about all my rage and feelings” (Ellis, interview by Coleman).

Although it would be precipitate to draw any substantial conclusions here, it is obvious that Ellis’s unresolved problems with his father constitute part of the anger and rage latent in the violence of Patrick Bateman. It also partially explains the gothic feel of the novel in comparison with McInerney’s two novels. The personal traumas of McInerney’s protagonists form lucid themes within his novels and they are directly relevant to these protagonists’ disorientations in New York City. In comparison, Ellis’s personal trouble seems to contribute indirectly to what makes his character, Patrick, a psycho killer—a point which cannot entirely be explained by the novel’s cultural context. In this sense, the violence in *American Psycho* arguably has a deep autobiographical element to it. This can perhaps be proved by the author’s reaction to *American Psycho* when he reread it years later. After being reconciled with his father through writing *Lunar Park* (2005), Ellis reread *American Psycho* and found the violence in it “upsetting” and stated that he felt “the violence bothered” him and was “surprised by that” (Ellis, interview by Widmyer). It is my argument that this latent autobiographical rage, caused partially by his troubled relationship with his father, was only brought to full force in the psychotic character of Ellis’s serial killer Patrick, whose murderous activities complement the violence-imbued popular culture augmented by mass media in 1980s New York.

Patrick Bateman is fundamentally a hollowed-out individual whose identity is an assemblage of postmodern conditions, developed out of “a situation in which ‘something definite’ at the centre of our existence is

missing” (Frisby, *Cityscapes* 11). This is not only revealed through the object-laden, soulless lifestyle he is leading, but is perhaps more clearly shown through Ellis’s playful manipulation of narrative voice in the novel. Ellis creates a narrator who should not be trusted. Although the unreliable narrator holds up a mirror in which Ellis’s reader can perceive a grotesque version of 1980s New York, the conflicts within the narrative voice and the gap between textual details arouse our suspicion. The credibility of what the narrator says, and hence the reliability of Patrick as the protagonist, comes into question.

This can be shown in the second third of the novel. When the monster in Patrick is unveiled through a series of killings, the narrative voice fails to clarify for the reader whether all the murders Patrick has committed are real or merely his fantasies. This impression is particularly strong at the end of the novel. After Patrick kills his colleague Paul Owen out of professional jealousy, he goes to check Paul’s apartment where he has already hidden the bodies of two women he killed earlier. To his surprise, he encounters a real estate agent who has covered up his crimes in order to sell the apartment. This leaves the reader asking whether Patrick has really killed these two women or not. Later, Patrick confesses his murder of Paul to Harold Carnes, his lawyer, and his confession is recorded on Harold’s answering machine. However, Harold thinks Patrick is merely joking and even claims that he has had dinner with Paul Owen a few days before in London.

The unreliability of Patrick’s crime extends to the whole story and renders the credibility of Ellis’s narrator questionable. The implication of an unreliable narrator is manifold. Firstly, the fact that Patrick is excused from his crime by a culture that judges a person entirely on appearances, ridicules the shallowness

of contemporary American culture. Moreover, the fact that even after his confession, Patrick's lawyer is reluctant to believe him to be the perpetrator of such crimes and even provides evidence to prove his innocence, strengthens the satiric critique at work in Ellis's text. By implication, it is the culture of surfaces that defends a criminal because of his glamorous appearance. Secondly, the unreliability of the narrator suggests the dissolution of clear distinctions between illusion and reality. By revealing the unreliability of his narrator at the end of the story, Ellis sheds light on a different perspective through which the reader is encouraged to reconsider the earlier parts of the novel. And this leads the reader to doubt the reliability of the narrative as a whole. This echoes the ending of McInerney's *Story of My Life* in which the narrator claims that "ninety percent of it was just dreaming" (188). Both Ellis and McInerney have playfully utilized their narratives to emphasize that the gap between reality and illusion is precarious. This playfulness functions to offer more than the mere impression of a contemporary culture which, through its obsession with surfaces, serves to annihilate reality and replace it with a new experience of depthlessness formed through endlessly proliferating images and signs. This new reality is, according to McInerney and Ellis, essentially an illusion. While this replacement of reality explains the utter disorientation and emptiness of Ellis's and McInerney's characters, it also demonstrates the key features of the "cultural shift" perceived by Annesley.

Such an intensification of the idea of commodification in theme and narrative is a feature that can be recognized throughout 1980s New York novels and beyond. Chick-lit, a highly commodified genre, typifies consumer culture's intensified influences on literature in recent years. For chick-lit

writers, integrating commodified terms into the everyday language of their characters is almost unavoidable. This is because their characters live in the new reality dominated by illusory surfaces that cannot lend them any emotional depth in New York City. Books like *Sex and the City* (1996) by Candace Bushnell and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) by Lauren Weisberger typify such an urban literary genre. In these novels surfaces are exhibited, celebrated, and worshipped while human relationships become increasingly shallow and depthless. For most of the time, their characters join in the parade to celebrate commodity fetishism. And Bushnell's book, in particular, "nurtures and reinforces patterns of conspicuous consumption" (Annesley, *Fictions of Globalization* 34).

Candace Bushnell

In *Sex and the City*, for example, excessive commodification has become a confessed reality in late-capitalist New York. In contrast to Ellis's treatment of consumerism in *American Psycho*, Bushnell represents clubs, brands and fashion not in an ironic matter, but in a matter-of-fact tone. For Bushnell, these highly commodified sites and practices are facts, realities and sets of knowledge. Through her representation of them, she informs her reader of those urban conditions that nurture the sexual politics unique to New York. Originally a serialised column in the *New York Observer*, Bushnell's episodes were compiled into a book and published in 1996. Bushnell initially intended to use the column to offer advice to those female readers who sought love and romance in New York City. Eventually, however, she compiled the column

articles into book form and *Sex and the City* soon became famous for its light-hearted, witty summary of sexual politics in 1990s New York. Adapted by Darren Star and screened in 1998 by HBO, the TV show became a great success. Today, the show has established itself as a bible for female viewers. With its wide-ranging references to fashion, brands, restaurants, clubs and sexual politics, the programme has also proved itself as a reference guide to trendy lifestyles in New York City.

Bushnell's story focuses on the life of a group of upper middle class journalists, editors, writers, directors, movie producers and New York socialites. Their attitudes towards marriage, romance, and love form the main theme of the novel. By following their gossip about love and sex in stylish clubs, restaurants, hotels, shopping malls and their homes on Park Avenue or Fifth Avenue, Bushnell reveals a New York City whose consumer culture is fragmented by distinct sub-cultures (for example, celebrity culture, yuppie culture, etc), lifestyles, professions and personal choices. At the centre of these representations, Bushnell captures New Yorkers' changing attitudes to human relationships under the impact of excessive consumer culture and a proliferated media culture.

Such an impression can be felt when she describes "the Bowery Bar" (3) which often hosts actors, actresses and film directors. Her depiction of the bar shows a socialite community for whom human interactions are based on an ambitious pursuit of fame and success:

There's Francis Ford Coppola at a table with his wife. There's an empty chair at Francis Ford Coppola's table. It's not just empty: It's alluringly, temptingly, tauntingly, provocatively empty. It's so empty that it's more full than any other chair in the place. And then, just when the chair's emptiness threatens to cause a scene, Donovan Leitch sits down for a chat. Everyone in

the room is immediately jealous. Pissed off. The energy of the room lurches violently. This is romance in New York (*SATC* 3).

To sit and chat with the film director Coppola means, conceivably, to conduct an important business discussion. This is the main reason that actors and actresses patronise the Bowery Bar. The Bar, in this light, is an arena of fierce competition, a means to fulfil one's ambitions. And what takes place in the bar well encapsulates what happens elsewhere in New York. It becomes a veritable synecdoche for the entire city. The envy caused by Leitch's appearance at Coppola's table emphasizes the heatedness of such competition. For Bushnell's characters, to become a customer in this bar means to identify themselves with these socialites. It is a label signifying social status and identity. To be a consumer here also affords potential opportunities with wealth and power. This sets the scene for the essential character of human relationships in Bushnell's New York City throughout the novel. The "romance" of such relationships, according to the author, is totally depleted.

Bushnell's characters are apparently better accommodated to excessive consumerism than McNerney's and Ellis's characters. They demonstrate a true appreciation of conspicuous consumption. To incorporate such conspicuous consumption patterns into their daily life is regarded by these characters as a skill of survival. That is why Leitch is envied: not only because he consumes in the Bowery Bar, but also because he consumes the "empty seat" beside Francis Ford Coppola. He is completely in command of the rules of consumerism in Bushnell's late-capitalist New York. Compared with McNerney's or Ellis's characters, Bushnell's characters are more eager to embrace consumer culture in positive terms. Mastering the rules of such a culture is essential for these characters. To accept the fiercely competitive attributes of such a culture of

appearances and incorporate them into their own personal worldview is key to survival in this urban jungle. By representing the Bowery Bar in this way, Bushnell offers her readers a shorthand of human relationships in contemporary New York. And contrary to the romantic imaginations of her readers, Bushnell's human relationships are determined by a distinctly late-capitalist consumerist logic as fundamentally pragmatic, depthless and unromantic.

In order to understand how urban consumerism has reduced human relationships, particularly romantic relationships, to a depthless monetary exchange we need to investigate the New York City painted by Bushnell in more detail. According to Bushnell, this is a city that is mapped by "the Bowery Bar" (3), "the Four Seasons" (9), "Mortimers" (14), "Le Trapeze" (10) and various other trendy, expensive Manhattan clubs and restaurants. Her characters are mostly celebrities or socialites. Committed supporters for conspicuous consumptions, they wear "Gucci coat[s]" (47), "Jil Sander suit[s]" (49), carry "T. Anthony bags" (47), or "leather pants custom-made at New York Leather" (47) and occasionally have to fight with other celebrities to get their designer clothes. Bushnell's New York is little more than a shopping mall for the rich and privileged, displayed in all its materialistic allure. Money becomes one's only passport to survival, access and travel. To acquire mobility in this market-place city, according to Bushnell, one needs either to have money or be able to transform oneself into a desirable commodity that is capable of displaying its exchange value.

Bushnell begins her exploration of the intensified superficiality of contemporary culture with a consideration of the relationship between sex and

the city. Whilst it is not new for sex to be depicted as a commodity in capitalist cities, sexual relations have never entered the public domain in quite the manner in which Bushnell's book illustrates. In Bushnell's New York, sex and sexuality have become public commodities. The discussion of "Le Trapeze, a couple-only sex club" where, according to a friend of the protagonist, "there were people naked—having sex—right in front of him" (10) reveals the novel's highly sexualized urban landscape. Although the protagonist's own investigation does not reveal any sexual show in Le Trapeze, such a depiction alerts the reader to the intensified commodification of sexualities in this particular public domain. In comparison, the city as represented by McInerney and Ellis depicts sex to be a largely private behaviour although their characters demonstrate the tendency towards an increasingly sexualized media culture. However, in Bushnell's novel, the revelation of commodified sex in New York is represented in a more straightforward and overt manner.³³

Such an impression is reinforced by Bushnell's decision to title the novel "Sex and the City". The author has cleverly capitalized on sex and the relationship between the two sexes to promote her own writing. The great commercial success of the book and subsequent TV show further exemplifies the prevalence of commodified sex in New York City. In this sense, the book itself offers clear evidence to the popularity of narratives that portray an intensified commodification of sex in the contemporary culture of New York City.

³³ The anonymous protagonist in *Bright Lights* feels ashamed of realizing that he is a "secret fan of Killer Bees, Hero Cops, Sex fiends, Lottery Winners, Teenage Terrorists, Liz Taylor, Tough Tots, Sicko Creeps, Living Nightmares, Life on Other Planets, Spontaneous Human Combustion, Miracle Diets and Coma Babies" when he reads the *New York Post*. See McInerney, *Bright Lights* 11. In *American Psycho*, Ellis's satire of the proliferation of sex and violence on American TV screens can be traced in the protagonist's eccentric act of watching *Body Double* (an X-rated movie) "thirty-seven times." See Ellis 108.

However, at the centre of Bushnell's discussion of the relationship between sex and the city, is the relationship between men and women under the impact of a sexualized, commodified urban environment. It might be true to say that Bushnell's female characters are fundamentally traditional in the sense that, echoing the women in Jane Austen's nineteenth-century novels, they still regard finding a wealthy husband to be a fundamental goal in life. Nevertheless, Bushnell's female characters bear conspicuous marks of the influence of contemporary New York City. They share equal rights with men and, in direct contrast with Austen's female characters, these women are depicted as enjoying an elevated economic status and financial independence. They still fall into the trap of becoming sexual commodities at times, but Bushnell's women also become consumers of sex, objectifying the men around them. For example, Samantha Jones, "a fortyish movie producer" (40), is described by the author as being:

always with at least four men, and the game was to pick out which one was her lover. Of course, it wasn't really much of a game, because the boyfriend was too easy to spot. Invariably, he was the youngest, and good-looking in that B-Hollywood actor kind of way (*SATC* 40).

Samantha's sexual freedom is utterly contingent upon her economic freedom in consumer society. As a movie producer, her profession implies the potential opportunities she can create for her young B-Hollywood boyfriends. Crucially, the image of Samantha breaks with stereotypical images of wanton women in Western literary traditions, who are able to keep secret lovers as a result of their husbands' wealth or family inheritance (such as Connie in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [1928]). Instead of a morally crippled or guilt-laden woman, Samantha is extremely free and rational, appearing to be equally, if not more,

successful than her male colleagues. Her image not only demonstrates the equality between the sexes in Bushnell's novel, but also suggests a changed cultural perception of sexual relationships. In a culture where men and women can be commodified equally, women enjoy the same liberty to purchase men for sexual pleasure as men do women. And one's economic status becomes the key element to decide one's role in a relationship. Bushnell's New York becomes a place where human relationships depend vitally on the economic status of individuals, rather than their emotional needs. Emotion and commitment become so rare between the sexes that they are often replaced by purely physical exchanges. This point is well expressed by the narrator: "[t]hese days, everyone has friends and colleagues; no one really has lovers—even if they have slept together" (*SATC* 3). In a city which is first and foremost defined by monetary exchanges, the scarcity of deep emotional commitments between men and women is a symptom exacerbated by this post-modern condition. Consumer culture encroaches on Bushnell's characters by eroding their sense of security and activating their defence mechanisms. The fear and conceivable risks of having a husband/wife that "turns out to be a liability" (*SATC* 3) is what renders urbanites unable to make a long-term commitment. As the narrator says, "we are all kept men and women—by our jobs, by our apartments [...] and we like it that way. Self-protection and closing the deal are paramount. Cupid has flown the co-op (*SATC* 2)."

Although it is never a novel perception to articulate money's depletion of individuality or emotional depth, it is in the context of Bushnell's contemporary New York City, where sex has become a convenient commodity, that the emotional commitment between men and women becomes extremely

materialistic. Its central attributes are defined by financial security and monetary guarantee. Excessive commodification in contemporary culture raises the bar for an individual to acquire financial security. Hence it becomes less likely for urbanites to make an emotional commitment. As a metropolitan individual, one is forced to deploy all of one's skills to avoid economic loss or financial risks in the first place. In light of this, the failure to commit to a long-term romantic relationship between men and women can be regarded as a direct consequence of contemporary consumer culture, which has victimized metropolitan individuals through depleting their sense of security. Indeed, this point has been articulated by Christopher Lasch in *The Minimal Self* (1984):

An analysis of the siege mentality and the strategies of psychic survival it encourages [...] will serve not only to identify characteristic features of our culture—our protective irony and emotional disengagement, our sense of powerlessness and victimization (18).

Although the notion of the minimal self is firstly used in “a time of troubles” (Lasch 1), which Lasch defines as the social context in the 1970s and 1980s when the American public became disillusioned with its government's policies during the period of economic recovery, the minimal self also appropriately reveals the encroachment of consumer culture into the lives of individuals in post-modern New York. The insecurity at the centre of Bushnell's female characters is fundamentally financial in nature. Although they are much more financially independent than Austen's female characters, their collective pursuit of husbands is still defined by the search for financial security. The intensification of consumerism in contemporary New York is thus revealed to be to blame for the victimization of these women by an age of money.

This reading of *Sex and City* foregrounds the increasingly shallow human relationships exacerbated by excessive consumerism in contemporary New York. This impression is particularly evident in Bushnell's representation of models and modelizers—characters that also occur in McInerney's and Ellis's novels. As if to complement McInerney's and Ellis's portraits of the city, Bushnell has led us to see how contemporary culture has diminished emotional depth through her representation of models. Modelling can be regarded as an activity which engages with a heightened form of surfaces. The fictional character of a model can reveal the level of a culture's reception of surfaces in the contemporary period. The evolution of this particular character in these writers' novels reveals society's consistently changing attitude towards surfaces and the ways in which surfaces have become a staple element of contemporary culture in 1990s New York.

In *Bright Lights*, for example, Amanda, the nameless protagonist's wife is a model. His fascination with her and the emotional damage she causes him can be regarded as a metaphor for society's blind reception of an emerging culture of surfaces. The protagonist's encounter with Amanda is therefore metaphorically suggestive of contemporary culture's shift to an increasingly shallow and depthless trend. The detriment of such a superficial culture is encapsulated in the protagonist's frustration and trauma after being abandoned by Amanda. However, if McInerney's protagonist has at least retained certain emotional depth when dealing with Amanda, who becomes a metaphor for cultural superficiality, then this attitude changes greatly in Ellis's *American Psycho*. For Patrick, models are like any other superficial women characters in his life: they are to be consumed (as commodities), mutilated, and annihilated.

Patrick's hatred of models and shallow-minded women indicates that there is an increasing cultural awareness of the shallow, superficial, materialistic nature of contemporary culture. Patrick's violence against them is therefore indicative of society's resistance to the superficiality of contemporary culture. On the other hand, his violence also suggests a relatively more mature understanding of surfaces and their consequences, when compared with McInerney's treatment of the model in his novel.

Such resistance is transformed into a more rational, controlled perception of models in Bushnell's *Sex and the City*, thus signifying the increasing superficiality of contemporary New York culture. Models, and the men who date them, are categorized, stereotyped and treated as a specific cultural phenomenon. Such a categorization is itself a forceful indication that suggests a more rational, perceptive and mature understanding of models and modelizers as an acute symptom of contemporary culture's obsession with surfaces. Bushnell offers a narrative snapshot of this particular group of individuals:

Modelizers are a particular breed. They're a step beyond womanizers, who will sleep with just about anything in a skirt. Modelizers are obsessed not with women but with models. They love them for their beauty and hate them for everything else (*SATC* 32).

This description of modelizers reveals the necessary stylistic consistency Bushnell requires in order to make her book an informed guidebook to contemporary New York cultural life. On the other hand, it shows that superficiality has become an acknowledged reality within this particular group of people and modelizers, in this instance, can be regarded as a metaphor for those who have skilfully mastered the requisite skills to negotiate the superficial culture of New York. Bushnell imposes a certain narrative ridicule

through summarizing, analyzing and commenting on this particular cultural phenomenon. However, the gap between stating the facts of the New York modelling industry and Bushnell's witty criticism becomes extremely slender here. At times, it can be easily overlooked by readers who treat the book seriously as a cultural guide to the socialite circles of contemporary New York. Unlike *American Psycho*, in which Ellis's irony is contained through its excessively commodified language and unbelievable violence and misogyny, Bushnell's irony can be felt through her cartoonish sketch of certain New York citizens and their sexual habits. Such a social sketch depicts reality, but also serves as a mockery of this reality through means of categorizing, stereotyping, and classifying in a shorthand linguistic style.

This impression is furthered when the narrator summarises the vocabulary used by modelizers in the section, "A Modelizer Glossary" (36). The narrator bluntly lists the glossary used by modelizers in straightforward equations: "Thing = a model, Civilian = women who are not models" (37). The irony and sarcasm are contained in this honest reference to a modelizer's daily vocabulary. It also strengthens the impression that certain women are objectified by contemporary culture. The extremity and scope of such objectifications becomes an index to the intensification of contemporary culture's superficiality.

The Metropolis and the Blasé Self

Philip Rieff argues that "as cultures change, so do the modal types of personality that are their bearers" (2). Through an analysis of the narrative

voices in McInerney's and Ellis's novels, we have also perceived a shifting metropolitan personality. It is characterized by increasingly shallow bonds with others and, at times, a pathological tendency as a consequence of personal traumatic symptoms worsened by contemporary consumer culture.

The anonymous protagonist in *Bright Lights* and Alison in *Story of My Life* are two vulnerable characters alienated by apparently icy, indifferent, and depthless portrayals of New York. Their submission to drugs and sexual excess only worsen their individual traumas and complicate their problems. It is, however, not a novel perception to identify the debilitating effects of a city on individual well-being. The capitalist city was critically investigated from its inception. Georg Simmel, forefather of the study of capitalist cities, has articulated the relationship between individual and metropolis in his famous essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life (1903)":

Money is concerned only with what is common to all, i.e. with the exchange value which reduces all quality and individuality to a purely quantitative level. All emotional relationships between persons rest on their individuality, whereas intellectual relationships deal with persons as with numbers, that is, as with elements which, in themselves, are indifferent, but offer something objectively perceivable. It is in this very manner that the inhabitant of the metropolis reckons with his merchant, his customer and with his servant, and frequently with the persons with whom he is thrown into obligatory association (12).

Simmel reveals a metropolitan picture in which human relationships have been reduced to a mere exchange of values, and the metropolis deprives people of the individuality that constitutes their inherent depth. Simmel's insights into the essential importance of personal relations in a metropolis explain the sense of loss and disorientation of metropolitan individuals like McInerney's protagonists. The rampant consumer culture in New York from the 1980s onwards, in this case, is only more detrimental to individuals and human

relationships. To put this in perspective, 1990s New Yorkers were much richer than the city's inhabitants a hundred years earlier, but their desire for money is made significantly stronger as a result of excessive consumerism and a media culture that augments capitalist greed. It is this postmodern condition that makes McInerney's protagonists deviate further away from profound emotional exchanges. And it is excessive commodification that makes superficiality the key feature of a contemporary metropolitan individual in New York.

These analyses of the characters in novels by McInerney, Ellis and Bushnell allow us to see a consistent change: from those disoriented urban individuals in McInerney's novels, whose failure to embrace an excessively commodified New York is caused by both personal traumas and the urban environment; to a disturbingly violent, misogynist American psycho in Ellis's novel, whose consumer fetish, violence and misogyny are deeply embedded in the contemporary media, consumer culture and drug culture of 1980s-1990s New York. These cultural symptoms become all the more apparent in Bushnell's characters. In Bushnell's book, however, the female characters establish their identities within New York City by moving away from damaged personas in McInerney's and Ellis's novels, and choose instead to embrace excessive commodification and internalize its inner logic.³⁴ Bushnell's characters receive these significant changes of contemporary New York culture

³⁴ In *Sex and the City*, there are also a few characters who are "damaged". However, Bushnell's treatment is entirely different from McInerney's and she often mentions these damaged characters in passing, hardly accentuating their emotional battles against personal traumas. In addition, there is the sense that these damaged individuals are regarded as losers in terms of the challenges presented by New York City. For example, in the plot, a fortyish woman who "couldn't find any dates [...] had a completely physical breakdown and couldn't keep her job and had to move back to Iowa to live with her mother" (28). By moving the traumatised character out of New York City, Bushnell seems to suggest New York is only for those who can maintain a practical, shallow ideology for romantic relationships. Bushnell's narrative focus remains utterly trained on these urban survivors and their surviving tactics in the city, rather than exploring characters who fail to incorporate themselves into city life.

more positively. They choose to master, rather than resist, the excessive commodification of contemporary New York culture.

What is worth remembering, however, is that all the characters portrayed by these three authors are privileged, rich, young, white Americans in New York City. How representative they are of the average New Yorker still needs to be contested. Yet it is their relatively advantageous financial backgrounds as privileged individuals (as in McInerney's novels), yuppies (as in Ellis's novel), socialites and celebrities (as in Bushnell's novel), that position them at the forefront of such a cultural shift. Primarily established within an intensified consumer culture, their off-beat behaviours (such as drug-taking, conspicuous consumption and celebrity lifestyles) reveal these characters to be valid social types through which we can understand and interpret late-capitalist New York. The evolution of these characters provides a useful perspective in examining the shift in culture and personality types represented in writing that focuses on living in New York. Through these authors, we can see the city's persona being characterized by an increased lack of emotional depth, an elevated sense of insecurity, and an extreme obsession with surfaces.

Conclusion

The reading of McInerney, Ellis and Bushnell leads us to identify changes in those literary forms, and characters that were closely associated with the socio-economic and cultural changes in New York City in the past three decades. These texts have revealed a literary connection through their shared thematic exploration of consumerism and New York City. However, it is crucial to note

that whilst commodification is often used as an all-encompassing approach to investigate novels of a similar kind, the narrative forms, stylistic features and characters in these texts open up interpretations that capture the inflexions of an increasingly intensified consumer culture in New York City. The specificity of this feature of New York life complicates any interpretation of the themes and narrative forms of these novels. The unique impacts of late-capitalism on these texts form the key arguments in this chapter.

In the above novels we meet a distinctive narrative form that is composed of a dominant preoccupation with surfaces, expressed through highly commodified language. These authors address the superficiality of contemporary culture through emphasising signs, brand names, and commodities. The second-person narrative in McInerney's novel renders this implication mainly through the superficial quality of the second-person narrative voice and present tense. His characters' failures to distinguish illusion from reality reveal the sense of disorientation caused by a consumer culture plagued by drugs, binge drinking, random sex and an urban environment that nurtures these social behaviours.

In Ellis's case, a highly commodified language is not simply an incorporation of commercialized terms to mimic a commercialized environment, but becomes a narrative strategy employed to satirise the urban environment and its hollowing-out of the inner self of each individual. It is a linguistic strategy that suggests the deviation of an individual from a healthy, wholesome personality under the influence of contemporary culture. The unreliability of Ellis's narrator strengthens this impression by dissolving the gap between reality and illusion. Patrick Bateman can therefore be understood

to represent the shallowness and violence of contemporary mass culture that Ellis aims to ridicule.

In Bushnell's case, however, the use of commodified language carries limited irony, which suggests that what is satirised in McInerney's and Ellis's novels has become an acknowledged reality in New York City during the period in which Bushnell was writing her novel. Although Bushnell does display irony through categorizing and stereotyping certain individual groups and cultural phenomena, such irony is limited in comparison with McInerney's and Ellis's representations. Her characters, rather than feeling lost in excessive consumerism, seem to adapt to the commodified urban environment successfully.

These changes in literature in turn complicate our understanding of the evolution of contemporary American culture. What were represented by McInerney and Ellis in the 1980s as sub-cultural phenomena have subsequently entered into mainstream culture and become a staple part of the contemporary culture of New York City. Today, the public obsession with images, binge drinking, random sex, drugs and the mass media's representation of all of these, has become an insistent part of youth culture in New York and other major Western cities. Consumerism becomes further fragmented by the influences of multiple cultural factors. Young people's consumption patterns, for example, are largely shaped by cultural trends, lifestyles, celebrity culture, and popular culture instead of work, production, tradition or class. More recent novels such as *Sex and the City* demonstrate the way in which further shifts in consumption patterns have been influenced by media and celebrity culture in New York City. How and what New Yorkers consume today is determined by multiple social

and cultural drives and, in turn, “the drive[s] for ever-increasing and differentiated consumption opportunities [...] allow people to construct new lifestyles”. This becomes “the defining characteristic of urban life towards the end of the twentieth century” (Thorns 120). Thorns’s observation here has unpacked the logic of late capitalism in Western cities like New York today and articulates that there is no single, dominant factor that determines contemporary consumerism, since the division between mainstream culture and sub-cultures has broken down.

What is worth noting is that these authors have clearly tried to establish a lineage with “mainstream” American writing and the American literary tradition in their works. McInerney’s *Bright Lights*, for example, is often read together with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925).³⁵ Widely regarded as a quintessential American author, Fitzgerald represents consumerism through “a new formation of capitalism” (Reynolds xiii) in 1920s New York. Both authors have captured the alienation of individuals in a New York City that is represented as being dominated by capitalist greed, and there is a kind of resonance between the two authors’ descriptions of the city. For example, Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* ends with a description of the Dutch traditions in New York City (115). Fitzgerald’s pursuit of the root and origin of American culture with the image of the Dutch implies a sense of loss in 1920s New York cultural life. Similarly, at the end of *Bright Lights*, McInerney’s nameless protagonist thinks of “the wooden shoes of the first Dutch settlers on these same stones” (180). This can be regarded as a gesture to suggest a similar sense of alienation under a further intensified mode of capitalism. The Dutch

³⁵ Elizabeth Young argues that “If Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney had a literary forerunner, it is surely F. Scott Fitzgerald.” See Young and Caveney 17.

imaginary used by McInerney can therefore be interpreted as a deliberate move to establish a literary lineage with not only Fitzgerald, but with American tradition in a more general sense.

As has been argued earlier, McInerney's narrative strategies also show traces of the "Iceberg Theory" propounded by Hemingway. The way in which McInerney creates suspense and drama by delaying the traumatic experience of his protagonists, and therefore delaying their emotional eruptions until the end of his novels, can be regarded as a formal strategy that is as equally effective as Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" in achieving a sense of repression. Indeed, in his investigation of the etymologies of downtown writing by authors such as McInerney and Ellis Robert Siegle suggests, quoting Andre Kostelanetz, that these texts record "an esthetic indebtedness" (qtd. in Siegle 393) to authors such as Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway and, more recently, the writers of the Beat Generation (393-5).

In the case of Bushnell's *Sex and the City*, there is also a sense of lineage that can be traced back to earlier American writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Edith Wharton. Bushnell's acute observation of changes in the American female persona is a concern shared by these earlier writers. But, of course, what differentiates Bushnell from these earlier writers, who were equally attached to consumerism and surfaces, is her alertness to a more highly commodified urban environment in which consumerism is intensified by mass media, technology, and deviant cultural trends and social behaviours.

The global influence of its mass media and exported cultural products makes American culture a productive example that other cultures should look to in understanding their own urban transformations. Intensified

commodification has become a universal feature of capitalist cities around the globe. Such influences even surpass formerly rigid ideological boundaries to exert a significant impact on Chinese cities. It is interesting to note that not only is Bushnell's *Sex and the City* attracting a huge audience and fan base in America, but it is also influencing Chinese audience and readers as well. In my discussion of contemporary Chinese authors in the next chapter, the intertextuality between Wei Hui and Bushnell will be considered, since it becomes a latent link to bridge texts written and consumed in New York and Shanghai. But what connects these texts more intimately is their thematic exploration of consumerism and its relationship with the city. The way in which consumer culture and urban environments affect the themes, characters, production, and marketing of Shanghai writing reveals the inner connectedness of these texts with novels written in, and about, New York. And by exploring urban writing which bears extremely different social and cultural influences, the next chapter will enrich my interpretations of commodification; and its features, tendencies, and relationship with metropolitan cities.

Chapter Two: “A Place Like Shanghai” —Fictional Representations of Shanghai in a Time of Change

Looking out across the water from the bund (sic), with one’s back turned upon the architecture of the past, one sees an awesome spectacle unfold. The view is analogous to that lauded by foreigners a century ago, of the bund (sic) itself viewed from Pudong (Campanella 91).

In Shanghai the discourse of sexual motives features in a slow-burning moral panic over the cultural consequences of the market transition, especially greed and avarice and the weakening of sentimental bonds. In popular culture and in idle talk (*xianhua*) about society, Shanghai people construct a mythic world of materially and sexually motivated characters, a dramatic tool kit of “big moneys” and “girls today,” who serve as foils for interpreting the actions of real people (Farrer 17).

In Thomas Campanella’s description, the Bund provides a perspective from which to capture a snapshot view of Shanghai in the twenty-first century.³⁶ The view of the Bund serves as a synecdoche for the city. It consists of a series of contrasts between old and new, East and West, shame and pride, and past and future. What creates such a spectacle of contrasts is the city’s former global eminence as a world port during its semi-colonial period (1843-1943) and its stunning speed of economic development over the past three decades. With a double-digit increase in GDP for sixteen consecutive years between 1992 and 2007, Shanghai has made itself a world metropolis again, like it once was in the flourishing 1920s and 30s. Such a drastic transformation, in what Rem Koolhaas has called a “maelstrom of modernization” (qtd. in Visser 15), makes Shanghai a productive candidate for comparison with New York. However, as

³⁶ The Bund is an area of the west bank of the Huangpu River in central Shanghai. It covers the central section of Zhongshan Dong Yi Road in Huangpu District. As one of the most famous tourist attractions in Shanghai, it is notable for the colonial buildings and wharves on its west and an increasing number of skyscrapers on the east bank (Pudong District) of the Huangpu River.

the economic power of Shanghai and New York forms the basis for my comparison of their fictions, it is important to note that their economic comparability is regarded more in terms of the relative importance of the economy to each country than in relation to one another. Such comparability is also based on an understanding of the economic impact on urban culture and residents in the sense that both cities' relatively sophisticated consumer cultures have nurtured certain metropolitan personalities that overlap and differ in ways which can be interpreted through literature.

As James Farrer has argued, economic change in Shanghai has been clearly felt in its literary productions. There is an obvious shift in literary themes, motifs, and narratives in recent Shanghai fiction that resonates with its dramatic socio-economic changes. Most apparent perhaps is the way in which history and the image of Old Shanghai (*lao Shanghai*) has been capitalized on in literature—through memoirs, history books, tourist guides, essay collections, non-fiction, and fiction.³⁷ Keying in the word “Shanghai” into China’s Amazon website, one will find 5,169 entries which contain the word “Shanghai” under the category of fiction alone (The number for New York is 17,795). Yet, as Farrer argues, understanding the role of such symbolic images in contemporary Shanghai literature as “big money” and “girls today” requires a moment of contemplation, in order to unpack their implications for a city that is as complicated, fast-changing and unique as Shanghai.

This chapter focuses on Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (TSES 1995),³⁸ and Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (SB 1999) and *Marrying Buddha* (MB 2004) to examine the changes of themes, characters, and narrative forms

³⁷ “Old Shanghai” is a vernacular term used to refer to Shanghai between the 1920s and 1940s. This was a time of economic prosperity and political turbulence for Shanghai.

³⁸ Hereafter Wang Anyi’s novel will be referred to as *The Song*.

which have resulted from Shanghai's urbanization, marketization, and commodification in the past three decades. This chapter investigates how Shanghai is represented, fictionalized, romanticized and capitalized on by addressing the differences between these two authors' versions of Shanghai. These different representations provide contrasting yet complementary ways of reading the city. Through pursuing these narrative differences, this chapter unpacks the relationship between literature and socio-economic change, considering Shanghai fiction in relation to New York fiction. While similarities in theme and form can be found between these Shanghai novels and those New York texts written by McInerney, Ellis and Bushnell that have already been investigated in the first chapter, the underlying causes for these similarities are different.

This chapter argues that Shanghai's Western-influenced consumerist tradition and apolitical culture have been represented as a persistent feature in these Shanghai novels. Wang's narrative provides both a macroscopic and a microscopic perspective through which to observe Shanghai from a literary vantage point. This allows her to reconstruct Old Shanghai in meticulous detail and constitutes her satire against contemporary writers' often romanticized stories of Old Shanghai. Wang's version of Shanghai is formed by a plebeian culture that has transcended any political and ideological impositions throughout history. This plebeian culture, for Wang, also becomes what defines the city's intrinsic character. By comparison, in Wei's version of modern-day Shanghai, the city is lost in a global consumer culture as a result of an inherited consumerist tradition as well as its current rapid economic transition in the contemporary period. The disorientation of Wei's characters reveals the

confusion felt by the younger generation of Shanghai residents when addressing the drastic social changes of recent years. Wei's depiction of Western influences informs the reader of their dilemma and helps us to understand their cultural identities. Set in different time-settings, yet with a certain coherence maintained in theme and form, the distinctions between Wang's and Wei's descriptions of Shanghai allow an insight into the city, its representations, and its persona.

Wang Anyi and Wei Hui: The Relationship between Author, Novel, Publisher and Censorship in China

In discussing Shanghai fiction published since the 1980s, we need to consider the fact that for this particular period there are a smaller number of available novels to analyze in comparison with New York fiction published across the same time period.³⁹ A key reason for this is that China's literary production, which was curtailed and limited during the Cultural Revolution,⁴⁰ has only gradually revived in the last two to three decades. As Gregory Lee observes: "it is true that the 1990s witnessed the popularization and economic exploitation of new literary and artistic trends but these, by and large, first emerged in the

³⁹ By using the term "Shanghai fiction" here, I mean novels that use Shanghai not only as a setting, but also as an indispensable theme. Shanghai fiction may not necessarily be written by local Shanghai writers, in Chinese or published in Shanghai. Wei Hui, for example, is not a Shanghainese, but she studied and lived in the city for a long time. Qiu Xiaolong's novels, which will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation, were written about Shanghai in English when he was living in America.

⁴⁰ The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a period of chaos and massive persecution in China. It was launched by Mao Zedong and his followers on May 16, 1966. It was officially a revolutionary class campaign to rid China of its "liberal bourgeois" elements by mobilizing the thoughts and actions of China's youth. Although Mao himself officially declared the Cultural Revolution to have ended in 1969, the term is still widely used today to include the power struggles and political instability between 1969 and the arrest of the Gang of Four, as well as the death of Mao, in 1976.

preceding decade” (5). Like many other industries in China, the publishing industry has only begun to resuscitate since the late 1980s, and the number of publications has only begun to grow significantly since the 1990s.⁴¹

In this context, there is an identifiable time lag between the comparative themes articulated in those literary works written in, and representing, New York and Shanghai. More specifically, the themes of consumerism, mass media and a yuppie lifestyle, widely explored in 1980s New York fiction, did not begin to occur more prominently on the Shanghai literary scene until the 1990s. For example, the “pretty women”⁴² and “post-eighties”⁴³ writers in Shanghai only began to discuss consumerism, sexuality, and drugs after the 1990s. These are themes that were less prominent in the fiction of earlier decades. These writers can perhaps better be compared with the literary “Brat Pack”, or “Generation X” writers who were particularly active in 1980s New York. Although the form of Shanghai writing is still very different from that of New York literature, the impact of urban consumerism, mass media, popular culture and yuppie lifestyles on these texts is apparent. The circulation and reception of these novels in both cities also show a similar impact of consumer culture on literary production. As with the “Brat Pack” writers who capitalized on their youthful experiences to stimulate market appeal in 1980s New York, “pretty women” writers in Shanghai also employed their own stories of youth, betrayal, sexuality and love to attract a readership in the 1990s.

As I have discussed in the Introduction, in addition to those “pretty

⁴¹ Data shows that the total number of books printed and published in China in 1998 was over twice than in 1988, and more than twelve times than in 1978. See G. Wang.

⁴² “Pretty women” writing refer to a new generation of women writers who choose to sell their own personal stories of love and sex. They are so called because of publishers’ commercial use of their images to promote their books. Most of them are beautifully photographed and their images are used on the covers of their own novels. See Shao.

⁴³ The “post-eighties” writers signify those writers who were born in the 1980s, for instance, Guo, Jingming, Han, Han and Zhang, Yueran. See Shao.

women” and “post-80s” texts that reveal a more straightforward connection with Shanghai’s rampant consumer culture in the last two decades, there are also some other writers who write about Shanghai from a historical perspective, showing different concerns about the social transformations Shanghai has recently undergone. Their texts are mostly nostalgic, although their nostalgia is situated within different historical contexts. Writers such as Cheng Naishan and Chen Danyan use family histories or socialite memoirs as important themes within their texts. Other writers like Ye Xin and Wang Anyi situate their writing about Shanghai against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution. These historical novels about Shanghai complicate our interpretation of the city’s economic regeneration in the contemporary period. Moreover, they offer an important way to understand what Farrer calls “a slow-burning moral panic over the cultural consequences of the market transition, especially greed and avarice and the weakening of sentimental bonds” (17).

Wang is a well-established writer in contemporary China. Born in Nanjing in 1954, she moved to Shanghai with her family the following year. Wang grew up in the city of Shanghai, which later became the setting for many of her stories. Like many of her peers, during the Cultural Revolution she was mobilized to the countryside: in this case, the rural Anhui province. This experience enters into many of Wang’s novels and makes her one of the most significant “educated youth” writers in China. Extremely productive, Wang has published more than twenty novels and many prose collections over the decades and has established herself as “one of the most prolific, dynamic, and imaginative fictional stylists on the Chinese literary scene” (Berry, *TSES* Afterword). As a witness to the major social changes in China since the

foundation of the People's Republic in 1949, her novels cover a wide range of themes and characters, and she has been an active writer for over two decades since the late 1970s. Among them, her novel *The Song* received the highest literary honour in China: the Mao Dun Prize in 2000.⁴⁴

The Song tells the story of a native Shanghai girl, Wang Qiyao, in tumultuous Shanghai. Infatuated with the glitz and glamour of 1940s Hollywood, she attends the 1946 Miss Shanghai Beauty Pageant when she is about eighteen (her age is not specified by the author) and wins the second runner-up prize. She is therefore nicknamed as “Miss Third Place”—an affectionate name to indicate her place in the beauty contest. However, Qiyao's stardom lasts for only a fleeting moment. Shortly after, the war breaks out. Being “Miss Third Place” becomes the memory that she clings to for the rest of her life. Maintaining a glamorous lifestyle by becoming the lover of a high official, Director Li in the then *Kuomintang* (KMT) government, Qiyao endures the vicissitudes of the times, living through the ups and downs of Shanghai's transformation from a capitalist's wonderland into a Communist city. Men of obscure backgrounds come in and out of her life, making her the centre of vile gossip spread by her neighbours. However, she shows great resilience and even becomes a single mother to a girl whose father's name is never revealed in the novel. Throughout the decades, Qiyao maintains a petit bourgeois lifestyle and her taste for fashion surprises even her daughter's fashionable friends. Yet her peaceful life is short-lived and she is found murdered at home one day in 1986—strangled to death by a desperate acquaintance who longs for the gold bars rumoured to be in her possession.

⁴⁴ Mao Dun Prize (*maodun jiang*) is the most distinguished literary honour for novelists in China. It is named after the famous writer Mao Dun. Wang Anyi's novel, *The Song* won the Fifth Mao Dun Prize in 2000. See Choy.

What is interesting about *The Song* is that it did not attract much public attention when it was published in 1995, given the fame and acclaim it has since attained. Compared with the attention Wang received with *Uncle's Story* (1990), *Utopian Poetry* (1993), and *Non-fiction and Fiction* (1993), *The Song* was relatively neglected. But this changed dramatically around 2000 when the city of Shanghai was seized by a fever for Old Shanghai stories. According to Chen Sihe, *The Song* “received unanimous praise from the authorities, [critics from] overseas, the general public and even the intellectual world” and this belated attention constitutes “a cultural phenomenon that is worth contemplation” (377). Such “unanimous praise” was further accentuated by a series of literary prizes which the novel received in and after 2000.⁴⁵ This contextualization reveals that *The Song* was received by the public as a novel that expressed the prevalent nostalgia for Old Shanghai, despite the author's own open disagreement.⁴⁶ For some readers, Wang's meticulous reconstruction of the texture of Shanghai's historical past represented her own distinctively nostalgic interpretation of Old Shanghai. This particular interpretation, imposed by the general public rather than the author's own intentions, made *The Song* extremely popular. It was soon adapted into a stage drama and a film, and these adaptations in turn enforced the nostalgia for Old Shanghai prevalent in the city at the end of the last century. However, as I will argue in detail later in this chapter, this interpretation of *The Song* distorted the author's original intention and overlooked the satire at work in the novel. Unlike other Old

⁴⁵ According to Chen Sihe, in addition to the Mao Dun Prize *The Song* was also listed among the “Ten Most Influential Writers and Works in the 1990s”, as recommended by a hundred critics in China. It also won the First “Flower Trace” World Chinese Literature Prize organized by Sin Chew Daily, Malaysia. See S. Chen 405-06.

⁴⁶ Wang has claimed that *The Song* is not a novel about Old Shanghai. And as the timescale of the story (1945-1986) shows, it is distinct from other Old Shanghai writing which mainly focuses on the history of 1930s and early 1940s. See Gan.

Shanghai novels, *The Song* was intended as a satire upon the blind fascination with Old Shanghai sagas popular in 1990s Shanghai. It was thus written as a critique of this collective appetite for a romanticized version of Old Shanghai that has become normative within contemporary popular culture.

Born in 1973, Wei Hui belongs to a new generation of writers who were directly influenced by a global consumer culture that quickly transformed Shanghai under China's open-door policy. Unlike Wang, in whose texts traditional Chinese mores and ethics are still persistent, Wei is an individualistic writer who is fascinated by contemporary Shanghai and its ambience of *yangqi*, or its Westernized lifestyle.⁴⁷ According to Megan Ferry, Wei considers "herself to be the spokesperson of her generation of writers" (658). Ferry uses her own words in *Crazy Like Wei Hui* (1999) to describe the manifesto of this group of writers as:

one of experiences, or simply put, 'materialist consumption, uncontrolled emotions, constant belief in the impulse of one's heart, to submit to the deep burning of one's spirit, to give in to craziness, to prostrate oneself to every desire, to entertain all kinds of life's elation with greatest passion (sic), including the mysteries of orgasm...' (658).

Such an individualistic tendency arguably leads to Wei's focus on representing the authentic self in her writing, rather than exploring those social norms that require women to be dignified and appropriate. *Shanghai Baby* is a book about her generation's indulgence in an unorthodox lifestyle that echoes the lifestyle shown in McInerney's 1980s New York novels. One review from *Publisher's Weekly* even compares *Shanghai Baby* directly with "Brat Pack" writing, claiming that it is "reminiscent of fiction by the brat pack writers of the 80s,

⁴⁷ Yangqi is a vernacular phrase in Chinese used to refer to an exotic and Western style. Shanghai women are always believed to be more yangqi than women from other parts of China because of the Western influences they are subject to.

though more clichéd and less edgy”. The book tells the story of 25-year-old Coco’s relationships with two men: a tender, impotent and drug-addicted Chinese man, Tian Tian, and a married German businessman, Mark. Coco is a young, ambitious writer and bartender who dreams of instant fame and success in 1990s Shanghai. Against her parents’ strong disapproval, she moves in with her boyfriend, Tian Tian, and adopts a frenzied lifestyle of drugs, sex and binge drinking. As her impotent boyfriend cannot satiate her sexual hunger, Coco embarks upon a passionate relationship with Mark who opens up her innermost lust. The story ends with Tian Tian’s death from a heroin overdose and with Mark back in Germany, leaving Coco bereft as a result of her own vanity and desire.

In terms of its reception, Wei’s novel stands in stark contrast to the critical acclaim that Wang’s writing has achieved. Her graphic depictions of female masturbation, sexual encounters and scenes of drug addiction provoked severe attacks from Chinese critics. According to Craig Smith, *Shanghai Baby* was openly criticized by the state media as “decadent, debauched and a slave of foreign culture” (qtd. in Smith). The marketing of the novel’s themes of sex and drugs not only stirred criticism, however, but also triggered media attention and high sales. The novel was the 1999 best-seller in China before it was banned by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Press and Publication in May 2005.⁴⁸ It is estimated that during the first six months after its publication in September 1999, the book sold one hundred and ten thousand copies in China.⁴⁹ After the ban, it sustained high volumes of sales, remaining a popular

⁴⁸ According to the newspaper *Chendu Commerce* (5 May 2000), copies of Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* were confiscated from all Beijing bookstores by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Press and Publication officials because it allegedly contained pornography. See Shao.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

underground novel until the authorities had to launch another nationwide campaign one month later to remove the book from the underground market.⁵⁰

The controversies surrounding the banning of *Shanghai Baby* serve well in helping us to understand the state of the publishing industry in China in the last few decades. In 1998, just one year before *Shanghai Baby* was published, a series of semi-autobiographical texts detailing the private lives of predominantly young female writers made their appearance in a leading Chinese literary journal called *Fiction World*. The journal's editors were concerned with introducing their readers to the work of a number of contemporary female writers in the belief that these works demonstrated the literary features of a transitional generation. Interestingly, these writers were asked to include their photos with their submissions to the journal. The publication of these images of fashionable, good-looking women caused a sensation, as did their depictions of sexuality and their feminist claims. The term "pretty women writers" was therefore coined by the editors of *Fiction World* to refer to this particular group of female writers who championed individualism, feminism and Western lifestyles. In the primarily self-censored publication circles of China, the act of publishing these writers was immediately interpreted as a message of consent from the authorities to publish texts of the same nature. Many publishing houses took advantage of this opportunity and began to publish work by similar female writers.

Crucially, it is worth noting that the 1990s was a time when the majority of Chinese publishing companies were endangered by shrinking state funding, which had formerly been their main source of income. In addition,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

censorship seemed to be loosening up in tandem with the country's economic liberalisation. As Bonnie McDougall observes, China's censorship has operated more as "a form of self-censorship" rather than "state censorship", particularly after the end of the Cultural Revolution (McDougall 208). Chinese publishers during this period frequently operated through self-censorship, to ensure that they eliminated any politically sensitive, ideologically incorrect and morally inappropriate content prior to publication. Within this context, some publishers began to seek larger economic margins by being more flexible with their self-censorship restrictions. Among them, the Chunfeng Literature and Art Publishing House, which later published *Shanghai Baby*, was typically market-oriented. It had achieved considerable economic success with some of its publications prior to the novels of Wei Hui. When Wei chose Chunfeng to publish her first novel, the chief editor at the time, An Boshun, immediately detected the market potential of *Shanghai Baby* and fully supported its publication and promotion. Yet the banning of *Shanghai Baby* was not only caused by the novel's graphic content. Wei's high-profile actions in promoting the book also caused pervasive anger from China's relatively conservative readership. As Shao Yanjun speculates, "Wei" has played the role of "an active 'agent' herself" in the promotion of *Shanghai Baby*:

Wei [...] designed the cover of the novel. On the cover, there was a beautiful young woman with her long hair hanging down, and on her naked shoulder there were some Chinese characters which read, "Wei" and "*Shanghai Baby*". Wei pronounced blatantly that the person in the picture on the cover was herself [...] the three commercial slogans on the cover were also drafted by her. [...] In her book-signing promotions, Wei was out of line and behaved "crazily". She shocked people with her outrageous words. For example, in a promotional activity in Chengdu, she said: "Let them take a good look at the breasts of Shanghai babies." [...] This incurred a succession of blame from the media and on the internet. However, the sales of

Shanghai Baby soared thereafter.

Wei's arrogance infuriated people and triggered public anger. Although her promotional stunts are now viewed more as marketing strategies intended to boost sales rather than express political critique, such actions served to harm Wei's image as a "spokesperson". The author's own provocative gestures during the promotional activities for *Shanghai Baby*, in conjunction with the feudalistic repression that characterized China's censorship system at the time, finally led to the book being banned. One important implication from this, however, reveals that Wei could easily have avoided the ban. Had she not behaved so provocatively in public and had her novel not been so popular as a result of the commercial hype, *Shanghai Baby* might have withstood the censorship. In fact, writers such as Mian Mian, who preceded Wei in publishing an equally graphic novel *La La La* (1997), had avoided censorship for two years after her book's publication although it was subsequently banned as a result of its graphic content. However, for Wei Hui the ban was not entirely negative in its consequences. It sparked tremendous public attention and boosted sales of the book. Consequently, the novel gained Wei international attention by virtue of its ban. Wei Hui even claimed that publishers from more than thirty countries had bought the copyright to the book.⁵¹

In 2004 Wei published *Marrying Buddha*, which is a continuation of Coco's journey of self-revelation. This time, Wei seasoned her novel with traces of traditional Chinese culture to cater to an international market. *Marrying Buddha* continues the story of Coco after she becomes a successful novelist—an experience shared by the author. The scene is mainly split between Shanghai and New York. In the novel Coco meets Muju, a Japanese-

⁵¹ Ibid.

Italian filmmaker in New York and they soon become lovers. Although the two share a creative and passionate obsession with sex, Coco realizes that she cannot conform to Muju's ideal of womanhood. Muju's obsession with food gives him high hopes that Coco will become an excellent cook and this drives them apart. Meanwhile, Nick, a slick and wealthy white American, appears in Coco's life. He claims that he has fallen in love with Coco and wants to develop a relationship with her. Finding it hard to resist Nick, Coco returns to her birthplace, Putuo Mountain which is adjacent to Shanghai, to find peace of mind.⁵² But when she returns to Shanghai, she is faced with a deeper dilemma as both Muju and Nick turn up to meet her. Coco again falls prey to a love triangle and unexpectedly finds herself pregnant with no idea who the baby's father is.

The story of Coco in both novels draws heavily on Wei's own experience. In *Shanghai Baby*, Coco has "published a collection of short stories [...] and is now a bare-legged, mini-skirted waitress at [...] Green Stalk Café" and "[is] studying Chinese at Fudan University in Shanghai" (2). These details replicate the author's own experiences exactly: Wei, too, graduated from Fudan University and published several short stories before *Shanghai Baby*.⁵³ This similarity of experience between the protagonist and the author suggests that Coco is perhaps Wei's surrogate. More interestingly, the author's image appears on the covers of both novels. *Shanghai Baby* features a photo of Wei,

⁵² Putuo Mountain is a small island in the Zhoushan Islands. The Zhoushan Islands are located to the east of Hangzhou Bay in the Zhejiang province, which is adjacent to Shanghai. Putuo Mountain is famous for its Buddhist temples and is a tourist attraction in the Zhejiang province.

⁵³ According to John Freeman, Wei Hui is "the daughter of a Chinese Army officer, she studied literature at the prestigious Fudan University. She didn't begin to write in the voice she uses now until she encountered the work of American novelist Henry Miller." Fudan University is a prestigious university in Shanghai, China. According to the *Academic Ranking of World Universities (AWRU) 2010*, Fudan University follows Peking University and Tsinghua University as one of the top universities in China. See Center for World-Class Universities and the Institute of Higher Education of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China.

bare-shouldered, while *Marrying Buddha* shows the author in the middle of a dance wearing a strapless silk *qipao* dress,⁵⁴ which reminds the reader of her Chinese identity. All these details affirm the connection between the author and the protagonists, demonstrating the autobiographical nature of Wei's novels. This is further facilitated by the first-person narrative voice employed in both novels. The first-person narrative blurs the distinction between the main character and the author, fiction and reality, making it difficult to judge the reality of those everyday experiences represented as occurring for women in contemporary Shanghai. However, while it is easy to say that Wei's protagonists are her surrogates, the relationship between the author and the protagonist is more complex.

Given these interpretations, the differences between Wang's and Wei's novels reveal that the two styles of writing serve as contrasting yet complementary narrative approaches through which to understand contemporary Shanghai. Wei's unconventional themes and styles, and *Shanghai Baby*'s controversial position as a banned novel, render her fiction an effective point of comparison with the novels of McInerney and Ellis. Her international fame, established "on the back of an advertising campaign exploiting the 'banned in China' label and combining orientalist 'China doll' images with promises of sexual excess and dirty realism" (Ommundsen 337), suggest that Wei's novels form the Chinese equivalent of Western chick-lit. This means that Wei's novels also offer a productive comparison for

⁵⁴ The *Qipao*, also called the Banner Dress, or in Qiu Xiaolong's novel the 'Mandarin dress', is a tight-fitting dress extremely popular between the 1920s and the 1940s for women in China. The traditional *Qipao* used to be long enough to cover women's arms and feet. However, influenced by Western designs in the late twentieth century, the *Qipao* became shorter and its waistline became more figure-hugging. After the 1950s, the *Qipao* became much less fashionable among Chinese women and was regarded as representing an outdated ideology. In recent years, however, this traditional dress has returned to mainstream Chinese fashion, adapted through modern reinterpretation. See Hu.

Bushnell's *Sex and the City*. Both writers explore female sexuality in the contemporary period by using the city as an important context. At the same time, *Shanghai Baby*'s allegedly pornographic content and subsequent banning directly contrast with the author's "orthodox" educational background as a Fudan graduate, furthering the controversy about her writing. This means that *Shanghai Baby* and *Marrying Buddha* are important texts to consider in attempting to understand the experiences of Wei's generation, and their resistance to postmodern consumerism, globalization, and Westernization in contemporary Shanghai.

In the case of Wang, however, the stark contrasts between her literary career and that of Wei are manifold. Wang is a well-regarded mainstream writer and former chairwoman of the Shanghai Writers' Association while Wei has received harsh criticism resulting in the banning of her novels. Wang's *The Song* is a piece of metafiction,⁵⁵ in the sense that it constantly draws attention to the tension between fiction and reality. It depicts Shanghai from 1945 to 1986, a historical period which partially precedes the author's personal experience. However, the historical representation of Shanghai is constructed in such meticulous detail that the book is often used by readers as a guide to the city. In contrast, Wei's *Shanghai Baby* is contemporary and heavily autobiographical. Wei was only twenty-five when *Shanghai Baby* made her name and fortune while Wang published *The Song* at the peak of her writing career at the age of forty-one. Interestingly, however, despite such disparities

⁵⁵ Metafiction, according to Patricia Waugh, is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such texts not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. See Waugh 2.

both novelists have achieved incredible market success. *The Song* was reprinted twenty-two times and sold more than five hundred thousand copies in China while *Shanghai Baby*, selling well in both domestic and international markets, made Wei possibly the best-selling Chinese writer in the international market of all time.⁵⁶

The contrasts and similarities between these two authors make it interesting to investigate the differences between their representations of Shanghai, its citizens and its transformations in the past and present. The juxtaposition of their texts helps us to consider the literary representations of Shanghai, across different generations of writers, and from different perspectives. Their shared interest in the city of Shanghai deserves attention and the focus of Wang and Wei on women's lives in a changing metropolis, with its own sophisticated consumer culture, makes them a productive pair of writers to consider in comparison with the New York writers covered in my previous chapter.

Characterizing the Ambitious City: Representing the East and West through Themes, Forms and Narrative Perspectives

The importance of Shanghai as a literary theme can clearly be felt in the novels of Wei and Wang. Both writers start their novels with descriptions of Shanghai. In *Shanghai Baby*, Coco's emotional attachment to Shanghai gushes out in the opening pages of the novel, leading us to appreciate the ambition she shares with the city:

⁵⁶According to Shao Yanyun, Wei "probably has the largest international market among contemporary Chinese writers and is the wealthiest at the same time". See Shao.

Every morning when I open my eyes I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It's become my ambition, almost my *raison d'être*, to burst upon the city like a firework. This has a lot to do with living in a place like Shanghai. A grey fog hangs over the city, mixed with continual rumours and an air of superiority, a hangover from the time of the *shili yangchang*, the foreign concessions. The air of superiority affects me: I both love it and hate it (1).

Here, by integrating the protagonist's ambition into the fabric of city and its glorious past, the author seems to suggest that Shanghai is able to accommodate and even provoke personal ambitions. The "air of superiority" the city inherits from its past, as a world metropolis from the 1920s to the 1940s, supports such an ambition. According to the protagonist, the economic prominence of Old Shanghai has bred a sense of continuing social superiority among its residents in relation to non-Shanghainese. Historically, the Shanghainese have been notorious for their snobbish tendencies: namely, their discrimination against those who came from poorer regions. Such a tendency was intensified at the time when Wei was writing *Shanghai Baby*, as the city was undergoing a dramatic economic transition towards becoming a global financial centre.

The representation of an "ambitious" city with a sense of "superiority" is deeply connected to the realities of 1990s Shanghai—a time when the city underwent a dramatic social transformation from a planned to a market economy. Such ambition was accentuated on a daily basis by the city's physical changes. In her non-fiction, *Images and Legends of the Shanghai Bund* (2008), Chen Danyan has described how "the most impressive scene of 1990s Shanghai is the construction smog everywhere" (246). Evidently, the city's ambitions were easily perceived from its changing physical appearance as its skyline became taller and its streets and open spaces cleaner and prettier

in the late 1990s. These economic opportunities brought about an influx of migrants both domestically and internationally, which exacerbated social tensions and competition in the city. Statistics show that by the end of 2000, Shanghai had a floating population of 3.87 million.⁵⁷ Coco's ambition thus represents not only the city's desire to restore the former economic glory that had flourished in Shanghai during the 1930s, but also expresses the intensity of competition growing within the city. As the above quote shows, the narrator closely associates her ambition with Shanghai's semi-colonial past. The "hangover" from that time of "foreign concessions" implies perhaps that such a sense of superiority originated in those Western influences that were once dominant in the city. Yet what is worth noting is Wei's tone towards this "semi-colonial" history. Generally viewed by Chinese people as a history of humiliation and shame, this semi-colonial past has been invested by the narrator with a positive emotional association, which is suggestive of Coco's own fascination with Old Shanghai Western traditions.

The connection between the city's ambition and that of its residents is more evident in *Marrying Buddha*. Now a successful novelist, Coco travels between Shanghai and New York and experiences an equally complicated emotional encounter with two men: Muju and Nick. Four years after the author's first attempt at representing the city, the individual ambition that Coco professes in the opening pages of *Shanghai Baby* has greatly increased:

Shanghai hadn't changed. It was still wild with ambition, speeding headlong down the road to capitalism. It was more hectic than New York—the noisiest and the most bewildering place in the world. The city had long ago earned a name for glitter and romance. Now its practical and crude sides had

⁵⁷ The floating population refers to the number of people who live in Shanghai for less than six months. See Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau and NBS Survey Office in Shanghai, "3.4 Resident Population in Main Years".

begun to show. It seemed that everyone had a get-rich-quick scheme, everyone was hurrying to catch the last train to fame and fortune. Everything was in flux, unpredictable; a crazy rush caught up in a great hallucination. It was exciting, but it left me reeling (*MB* 1-2).

Here the city's ambition is reified through everyone's "get-rich-quick" schemes, not just in the personal ambitions of Coco. This ambition has apparently become something shared by a substantial number of people living in the city. In this sequel, Coco is simply "left [...] reeling" by such a "hectic" display of Shanghai's naked ambition. The word "ambition" is often associated with a person's pursuit of power and wealth, and the act of exploring one's personal potential to achieve materialist success. It is more of a personal, than an impersonal, trait. Interestingly, however, ambition is depicted in *Marrying Buddha* (as in *Shanghai Baby*) as being directly associated with the city itself, denoting Shanghai's persona as if the city is one of the key characters in the novel,

Yet the concept of ambition becomes more meaningful and important in a city so full of potential as Shanghai appears in its (post)modern era, in which future possibilities are vast and open to all. Personal ambition becomes an important engine for an individual to make full use of the opportunities offered by the city. And, at times, such ambition can be attained through means of illegality and immorality. This personal ambition is firstly supported and encouraged by a constantly changing urban landscape. The emergence of massive skyscrapers and an increasingly commodified urban space populated by themed teahouses like "Shanghai 1933" (*MB* 4), nurtures an external environment that stimulates personal ambitions. The "awesome spectacle" on the east side of the Huangpu River, witnessed by Campanella from the Bund

for example, is typical of the city's ambitious environment. As such, the ambition described by Wei plays a vital role in connecting the urban environment with its residents: it represents not only a personal but also a social, attribute, a feature that is nurtured if not imposed on individuals by the urban environment of 1990s Shanghai.

What can also be identified here is a sense of urgency in the pursuit of ambition by Shanghai's residents. The description of "catching the last train to fame and fortune", for example, reveals an urgent drive to get rich quick. Interestingly, once again, the former glory of Shanghai is mentioned in relation to the contemporary city. The "glitter and romance" of Old Shanghai has been overshadowed by "its practical and crude sides" and a less romanticized side of the city emerges. It is accentuated by a morbid tension between fierce competition and over-reaching ambition. The urgency to actualize the ambitions of both the city and its citizens to the level of "hectic" success becomes what defines the city's current persona.

However, such a hectically ambitious persona is the direct result of those drastic socio-economic changes that have taken place in Shanghai over the last two decades. One important characteristic of Shanghai's economic transformation is that it is not based on free-market principles. Rather, this transformation represents an engineered economic change in line with Beijing's Reform and Opening-up Policy. Such an economic transformation brings together political, social, natural and capital resources simultaneously. Consequently, its speed of development far exceeds any other "natural" growth of a market economy. It is therefore easy to explain the "hectic" state of Shanghai as a direct symptom of a series of engineered, orchestrated, and

imposed economic policies. And the “hectic” state of the city is aggravated by a mismatch between economy and government management, in the sense that in a communist regime the legislative, administrative and ideological awareness do not totally comply with the fast-growing market economy that is often associated with capitalism. This image of Shanghai as metaphorically unwell is accompanied by Coco’s later pursuit of peace of mind in her rural birth-place. As a result, it is difficult to establish whether the author has purposefully chosen to displace the city’s ailing state onto the protagonist’s mental disturbance or whether the city has itself been the cause of the protagonist’s mental confusion.

More interestingly, Shanghai is directly compared with New York here. Coco’s transnational perspective allows her to observe Shanghai and New York together. The similarity, according to the narrator, is the “hectic” state shared by the two cities. Dubbed by the narrator as “more hectic than New York—the noisiest and the most bewildering place in the world”, Shanghai is depicted not only as beset by similar “capitalistic” problems to New York, but also by a mismatch between its political and economic structures. Crucially, such a depiction of Shanghai and its residents as occupying a hectic and unhealthy state is reminiscent of the New York portrayed in McInerney’s earliest two novels. McInerney’s New York is similarly associated with ailing protagonists who lose their grip on life by indulging in sex and drugs. Yet their ailing states are more closely related to New York’s excessive commodification and the opportunities it provides for a self-indulgent lifestyle. And what McInerney’s characters feel about New York is a sense of nihilism, instead of ambition.

The vigorous ambition of Wei’s characters, therefore, poses a sharp

contrast to the sense of nihilism prevalent in the protagonists of McInerney's novels. Although both cities are represented at a time of significant economic transformations, the natures of these transformations are entirely different. Shanghai's recent economic transformation has been accentuated by a shift from focusing on the "have-nots" to the "haves", as a result of the transformation from a rigid planned economy to a market one, while the economic transformation of New York City has adjusted its interest from the "haves" to the "have-mores"; that is, those people whose excessive wealth has been accrued through their association with the Wall Street boom. It is this sense of the economic resuscitation of Shanghai that encourages ambition in Wei's characters while it is New York's materialistic excess that creates nihilism in McInerney's characters. Such a difference can be perceived through the different degrees of commodification reflected in the narrative form and themes of these novelists' works. Specifically, although the novels of Wei and Wang bear the marks of consumer culture, they are not as extreme in their portrayal of affluent urban life as McInerney or Ellis.

At the same time, New York is less celebrated or admired in the two 1980s novels by McInerney under discussion in this dissertation than Shanghai is in the novels by Wei. Not a New Yorker himself, McInerney does not reveal any sense of worship for the city's equally stunning skyline through his characters in the way that Wei demonstrates in her representations of Shanghai. Coco's worship of Shanghai reveals that the impact on its residents of Shanghai's drastic transition is huge. In comparison, New York's process of urbanization and gentrification have developed over a longer period of time than the upward transition of Shanghai in recent years. New York's

gentrification was established during a century-long development and its impact on the city's citizens is relatively milder and more progressive than the urban transformation of Shanghai. In *Bright Lights*, for example, McInerney only makes passing mention of the city's landmark, the World Trade Centre, suggesting that he is not at all overwhelmed by this (post)modern spectacle. This contrasts with Wei's depiction of Shanghai via Coco, whose description of the Oriental TV Tower, as will be shown later, implicitly reveals her worship for the city's (post)modern spectacle.

Additionally, both McInerney and Wei portray the colonial history of the two cities, but through significantly different interpretative emphases. The past of New York City is portrayed by McInerney in his reference to the city's Dutch influences: "You think of the wooden shoes of the first Dutch settlers on these same stones. Before that, Algonquin braves stalking game along silent trails" (*BLBC* 180). Here, McInerney does not acknowledge the foreignness of New York City's colonial history. Instead, however, the city's Dutch inheritance is viewed as an incorporated tradition that suggests a sense of rootedness. New York's past only reminds the protagonist of how his forefathers have strived to settle down in this piece of "foreign land" and turn it into a home. For the protagonist, it is not an otherness, but a self. In contrast, Shanghai is a significantly foreign land in Wei's depiction or, at the very least a hybrid city, with its fascinating past generating different versions of exotic legends in comparison with the modern-day city.

In both *Shanghai Baby* and *Marrying Buddha*, Wei explores Shanghai's contemporary ambition and connects this with the city's past. Shanghai is represented as a place that has inherited Western influences in its past, whilst

its present is shaped through a capitalist consumer culture which is reflected in Shanghai's economic reform in the 1990s. Such a tradition of Western consumer culture becomes, according to Wei, the crucial ingredient in defining the city's basic persona. It therefore constitutes an important theme underpinning Wei's literary version of Shanghai and its effects upon her characters. In *The Song*, this Shanghainese ambition is different in nature. Unlike Wei, who saturates her character and Shanghai with an ambition and a fascination for Western consumerism, Wang reveals her personal ambition in writing an epic novel about Shanghai. Her ambition can firstly be shown through the narrator's carefully crafted perspective of observing the city. Standing at the "highest point in the city" and "looking down" (1), the narrator shows the reader a privileged viewpoint from which to observe the city. In contrast to Wei's subjective first-person narrative, Wang tries to show an objective and balanced view of the city by establishing an authoritative perspective and an omniscient third-person narrative voice that encompasses Shanghai comprehensively. The city she depicts is one that has been subject to competing influences from East and West throughout its history. And for Wang, Chinese tradition seems to hold a more dominant position within Shanghai than its Western influences.

This can be shown by looking closely at the first chapter of the novel. Wang deliberately sequences the content of this chapter. Specifically, the novel is foregrounded by five sub-chapters respectively titled "Longtang, Gossip, The Young Lady's Bedchamber, Pigeons and Wang Qiyao" (1-22). Together, they indicate the narrative framework of the whole book. The first sub-chapter is a detailed description of the *longtang* which serves as the general setting of

the novel, indicating the basis of the narrative structure. The second sub-chapter is concerned with gossip, which serves as a non-official, or in Mikhail Bakhtin's word "centrifugal" (272), narrative. The third sub-chapter focuses on the young lady's bedchamber, which is a private space for the protagonist and provides an inner perspective through which to examine the protagonist's personal life. The fourth sub-chapter deals with pigeons. As a typical metropolitan bird, the pigeon provides a mobile overview of the city—one that forms a "centripetal" (Bakhtin 272) narrative of the city. And the fifth sub-chapter explores Wang Qiyao, the protagonist. In this way, the author formulates an epigraphical narrative frame that resembles the early chapters in Cao Xueqin's (1715-1763) classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1784) in which Cao used a dream vision to foretell the destinies of his main characters.⁵⁸ As will be argued later in greater detail, these narrative settings play a vital role in achieving both a macroscopic and a microscopic view of Shanghai's history from 1945 to 1986 and demonstrate the author's vantage points of observation. The privileged perspectives of the narrator, as well as the way in which these perspectives complement one another, thus establish an authoritative, omniscient inner eye that is synonymous in the story-telling with a set of all-encompassing cameras. This narrative and perspectival arrangement establishes Wang's authority in observing and representing Shanghai. But at the same time, the structural resemblance between *The Song* and Cao's classic indicates the essential position of Chinese influences on Wang's narrative structure.

It is within this sophisticated narrative framework that Wang chooses to

⁵⁸ *Dream of Red Chamber* was written by Cao Xueqin in the mid-eighteenth century during the Qing Dynasty. It is a masterpiece of Chinese vernacular literature and is generally acknowledged to be the pinnacle of classical Chinese fiction. It is believed to be semi-autobiographical, mirroring the fortunes of the author's own family. The novel's name is alternatively translated as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, or *The Story of the Stone*.

begin her description of Shanghai by drawing the reader's attention to *longtang* alleys—a typical local architectural form.⁵⁹ For Wang, Shanghai is composed of *longtang* alleys. They form the body and soul of the city. At the centre of such a depiction, the *shikumen* house emerges as the key construction of the *longtang*. Through a detailed description of this architectural complex, Wang defines Shanghai's temperament and character:

Looked down upon from the highest point in the city, Shanghai's longtang—her vast neighbourhoods inside enclosed alleys—are a magnificent sight. The longtang are the backdrop of this city. Streets and buildings emerge around them in a series of dots and lines, like the subtle brushstrokes that bring life to the empty expanses of white paper in a traditional Chinese landscape painting. As day turns into night and the city lights up, these dots and lines begin to glimmer. However, underneath the glitter lies an immense blanket of darkness—these are the longtang of Shanghai (TSES 1).

Here, a panoptic view of the city reveals a spread-out vista that resembles a “traditional Chinese landscape painting” with “dots and lines” and “subtle brushstrokes”—a metaphor that immediately compares *longtang* alleys to a black-and-white Chinese water-colour painting. As the narrator continues: “The darkness looks almost to be a series of furious waves that threaten to wash away the flowing dots and lines” (1). Apparently, the blanket of darkness is a metaphor for the *longtang* alleys of Shanghai. By likening the scale of the city's darkness to the domestic object of a “blanket”, the narrator shows the essential role of the *longtang* in the everyday life of Shanghai citizens. The *longtang* becomes a symbol for the quotidian life of ordinary people and, suggestively, its massiveness forms the basis of the city. Such a depiction

⁵⁹ The *longtang* is a typical architectural form in Shanghai, and a few other coastal cities and towns nearby. It is formed by *shikumen* houses, or European-style terrace house with Chinese features (such as the patterned Chinese decorations which frame the entrances to buildings). A *longtang* is a neighbourhood circumscribed by alleys of *shikumen* houses. The *longtang* is different from traditional Chinese alleys such as the *hutong*, which is typical of Beijing. See Huang.

shows the dominance of *longtang* alleys in the city. Yet they “threaten” to overshadow the “dots and lines”. Here “dots and lines” constructs another metaphor for the superstructure of the city. The author seems to suggest that any political and ideological impositions from Shanghai’s superstructure cannot change the mundane, everyday life of ordinary people. The *longtang* and its culture, therefore, form the body and soul of the city and determine its intrinsic personality.

Wang’s Shanghai is surely different from Wei’s, yet the differences are not as distinct as they initially appear. Essentially, *longtang* houses are unique Shanghai architectural constructions integrating Western styles with Chinese patterns. The influences of the West on Shanghai are clear in Wang’s novel, just as they are in Wei’s opening pages. But what differs in these two texts is Wang’s emphasis on a cultural tradition that constitutes the fundamental layer of the city. The analogy of the water-colour painting seems to indicate that the Chinese influences on Shanghai are still dominant. And, as Wang puts it, these *longtang* houses are the “backdrop of the city”, formulating, most probably, the city’s essential character. This makes her depiction different from Wei’s portrait of Shanghai. Wei’s Shanghai is heavily influenced by Western culture, in the sense that the revitalization of its consumer culture in the contemporary period is reminiscent of those Western capitalist traditions passed down from its semi-colonial past. In Wei’s novels, these contemporary influences from the West are represented through a consumer culture that is accentuated by Western-style bars, cafes, and characters who adopt a Western lifestyle in 1990s Shanghai.

These differences in the portrayals by Wei and Wang of the extent of Western influences on Shanghai are not only apparent in terms of theme, plot

and character, but are also evident in the formal features of their novels. To emphasize such Western influences, Wei uses epigraphs containing quotes from a wide range of Western sources. For example, Wei draws on the words of popular Western writers, artists and singers, such as Joni Mitchell, The Beatles, William Burroughs, and Elizabeth Taylor to indicate the Westernization of Shanghai's urban culture. Such referencing of Western sources also sets the mood of the novel. *Shanghai Baby* can be regarded as one of the first novels that openly discusses the reception of Western culture and values in contemporary Shanghai. Such referencing can also be regarded as a strategy used by the author to embrace and echo popular trends in 1990s Shanghai culture—a time when Western popular culture entered the Chinese market and filled the city's cultural vacuum as a result of the Cultural Revolution.

In addition to the deliberate use of quotations from Western sources in her epigraphs, the names of Wei's main characters in *Shanghai Baby* also show the clear influence of Western culture on her writing. Coco, as the narrator claims, is named "after Coco Chanel" (1). Ma Dangna, Tian Tian's best friend, is a Chinese transliteration of the English name, Madonna. Ah Dick, a friend of Coco, is a combination of a Western name with a Chinese one (307). Moreover, English words and idioms pop up here and there in the Chinese context of the novel.

These formal features indicating Western influences are apparent in 1990s Shanghai. In reality, an influx of popular cultural products from Western countries entered the Chinese market following the country's open-door policy. The mass media was among the first industries to embrace global consumerism vigorously. Shanghai TV screens in the 1990s were populated by imported

Hollywood films, dramas and Western pop music. Nightlife came back to the Shanghainese in the form of various Western-style nightclubs, bars and KTVs. Meanwhile, Shanghai citizens began to enjoy an increased level of freedom in their social life and could lead their personal lives as they saw fit. As Li Tiangang argues, “in the 1990s, [...] [Shanghai] culture is like a kite cut loose. [...] escapism, contempt for moral sublimity, and self-indulgence become popular codes of behaviour” (378-79). The repercussion of such a surge of Western cultural influences was a great sense of disorientation felt among the general public, especially young people in Shanghai.

This referencing to Western culture continues in *Marrying Buddha*, yet with an important twist. In *Marrying Buddha*, the epigraphs contain a wider range of quotes from both Chinese and Western sources. These quotations are taken from intellectuals, politicians, philosophers, socialites, artists and writers as varied as Confucius, Lao-tzu, Henry Fielding, James Joyce, Yoko Ono, Eleanor Roosevelt, Coco Chanel, and Hilary Clinton. Wei even quotes Candace Bushnell from *Sex and the City*. Such a combination of Chinese and Western quotes suggests that the author is highly conscious of her international readership. Although she shows herself to be a loyal follower of Western culture through the representation of Coco and Shanghai in *Shanghai Baby*, it seems that Wei’s identity as Chinese only becomes apparent when Coco, and perhaps the author herself, is on foreign soil. Meanwhile, by using Chinese sources in her epigraph, there is a sense of homecoming and a celebration of Chinese culture. The themes of Shanghai, hometown and religion Wei explores in *Marrying Buddha* also bear the same indication.

Through its interweaving of quotes, which move between ancient Chinese

wisdom and modern Western culture, *Marrying Buddha* balances out its cultural components to make its narrative more accessible to the international market. As Ommundsen argues, Wei Hui is a “willing participant in the comedy of errors that is East-West cultural relations” and “she plays the system to her advantage” (339). Wei certainly perceives the opportunity that an international market offers. Her integration of Chinese elements into *Marrying Buddha* is a clear indication of her effort to enhance the market appeal of her novel. This shows Wei as a market-conscious and market-oriented writer who knows how to cater for the taste of her readers by making necessary changes in her novels.

In Wang’s novels, the formal features that indicate the equal influences in Shanghai of both Chinese and Western cultural sources are apparent. This can easily be seen from the subtitles of her tripartite novel. For example, some subtitles use transliterations of English words such as “camera”, “Alice” and “colour”. The use of *yangjingbang* English, or Pidgin English in Shanghai dialect, is clear evidence of Wang’s attempt to incorporate the city’s Western heritage and tradition.⁶⁰

In contrast to these Westernized titles, a few of Wang’s chapters use lines from a famous ancient Chinese poem, “*Huang He Lou*” (*The Yellow Crane Pagoda*), and four-character Chinese idioms such as “*huoqi xiaoqiang*” (hatching a catastrophe), and “*biluo huangquan*” (from heaven to hell). These idioms are borrowed from a Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi’s (772-846) famous

⁶⁰ Yangjingbang English is formed by transliterations of English words pronounced through Chinese pinyin. It used to mean Pidgin English only. Yangjingbang English has become part of Shanghai dialect since a large foreign population stayed in Shanghai in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yangjingbang was originally a canal in the north part of Old Shanghai. It was used as a borderline between English and French concessions. Its location is near the East Yan’an Road of today’s Shanghai city. See Y. Zhang 149.

poem, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*.⁶¹ Apparently, Wang borrows the title from Bai's poem for her book too. In this way, Wang seems to suggest that Chinese influences are equally, if not more, important in her representation of Shanghai.

Yet what distinguishes Wang from Wei in their respective representations of the East/West influences on Shanghai is the former's clever use of perspective. As I argued earlier, the author invokes a set of narrative frames to form an omniscient perspective over the city. Besides giving a detailed description of *longtang* alleys at the beginning of *The Song*, Wang skilfully uses this perspective in other narrative settings to enforce her command of historical time and space. She does so by combining the "*longtang*" and "Customs Houses" to form what Bakhtin has called "chronotopes", in order to link past with present, and time with space. The concept of the chronotope was first used by Bakhtin to refer to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal [chrono-] and spatial [tope] relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). For Bakhtin, chronotopes such as "the road" were a defining factor in shaping literary genres, functioning as "organizing centers" for narrative events since they dictate settings, characters and types of interaction, as well as a certain experience of time (250).

Bakhtin's description of the chronotope expresses the precise way in which the *longtang* works in Wang's novel. Specifically, the *longtang* alleys offer an important urban space in which stories can happen, thus serving as a

⁶¹ "Huang He Lou", translated as The Yellow Crane Pagoda, is a famous and widely quoted poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Cui Hao (circa 704-754). Wang uses the first two lines of the poem respectively as the titles of two of her chapters. They are "An Old Friend Flow Off on a Yellow Crane" and "All That Remains Is the Tower Once It Was". Bai Juyi's oft-quoted poem *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* describes the love story between the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty, Li Longji (712-756), and his beloved concubine, Yang Yuhuan (719-756).

vital spatial node through which to situate the plot and characters. In a more general sense, the massive architectural construction of the *longtang* forms “the backdrop of this city” (A. Wang 1) and extends the urban space with all its daily happenings. The *longtang* is also a historical setting. It has stood the test of time and therefore connects past with present. As a unique local architectural type combining Western and Chinese features, the *longtang* is able to accommodate different cultures in a spatial and chronological arrangement. Therefore, the setting of the *longtang* provides a basic time-space axis in which the author can conduct her meticulous observations of the daily routines of Shanghai residents. It also shapes the worldview of the novel’s characters through its unique organization of space. The way in which the *longtang* space is organized is directly relevant to how its residents see the world. As such, this particular architectural form is able to link characters, plots, urban spaces and historical time together to formulate a comprehensive picture of everyday life in Shanghai.

While the *longtang* offers a perspective that can encompass a meticulous yet comprehensive observation of ordinary people and their way of life, the Customs House plays a different role.⁶² Located at the Bund, the central area of the city, the Customs House links the micro with the macro, the characters with the city, and the past with the present. In the novel, the bell at the Customs House keeps track of the city’s history, as well as tracing the development of the storyline, with its rings. In this way, the bell connects the particular temporal moment of everyday life with the general history of the city.

⁶² The Customs Building on the Bund was firstly built in a Chinese style in 1857. It was rebuilt in 1891 according to a design by an English architect. By the end of 1893, the Gothic-style main buildings were completed. In 1925, the local government decided to rebuild it again and they invited another English architect to design the building. For more information, see Xue 62-64.

Therefore, the Customs House serves as an organizational tool to bring the setting, the plot and the destiny of the characters together, forming an important node linking time, space and individuals:

From the dressing room window, Wang Qiyao could see the Bund, stretched out like a white ribbon. It was a Sunday afternoon and the sunlight was especially refreshing. The clock tower at the Custom (sic) House rang the hour, its chiming gradually spreading through the air as if from someplace far, far away. [...] All of his deepest thoughts were dialogues with the past. At least the clock in the Customs House was still ringing, in a world where everything else seemed to have vanished like clouds and mist, and the sound he heard was the very sound heard decades ago (*TSES* 40, 366).⁶³

Rather than rigidly following the chronological order of a historical account, Wang deploys the Customs House to transcend time and space so as to assist her fictional construction. The ringing of the clock's bell immediately links a specific moment of the present time to the general history of the city. Thus the clock establishes a chronological cohesion between individual history and the broader history of Shanghai. Therefore, it serves as an organizing tool to bring together the specific with the general, the individual with the collective, and the present with the past. Accentuated by such a chronotopic setting, the interconnectedness of time and space echoes the theme of life and destiny and reveals the author's intention to investigate the timelessness and strength of everyday *longtang* life in resisting historical modifications.

Besides these two chronotopes, there are other interesting metaphors employed by the author to acquire a privileged, all-encompassing view of the city and its everyday life. Gossip is one of them. In his influential essay,

⁶³ In the second part of the quote, the author is describing Old Colour, a friend of Wang Qiyao. Wang Anyi uses a chapter to describe Old Colour, who, according to the author, is one of "a specific breed of debonair figures active during the fifties and sixties. These were the keepers of old-style Shanghai fashion in the new society, at a time when holding on to the past was considered radical. The term probably originated with the English word 'old colour', or perhaps 'old classic', a remnant of the colonial culture of Shanghai in the day of the treaty ports". See A. Wang 361.

“Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin described the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” as key forces in the formation of what he termed “heteroglossia,” or the variety of complex conditions that influence the creation of meaning in language. For Bakhtin, every:

concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity (272).

Although Bakhtin’s theory was meant to describe certain rules governing linguistics and its cultural world, it also reveals the mechanism through which meaning is generated. In this case, the meaning of Wang’s novels depends crucially on the perspectives of her description. For Wang, gossip functions as a “centripetal” narrative, complementing the centrifugal, official perspective of the city; the latter of which is achieved through “the high point” (1) where the narrator stands as well as the panoptic view offered by pigeons. Gossip forms the daily dialogue in the *longtang*. It can be passed down from generation to generation and therefore entails a historical lineage of its own. Gossip thus provides a narrative framework for the sagas of the *longtang*, which would otherwise be overlooked through the narrative’s official perspective. It accentuates the importance of minute details, intimacy, and the everyday life stories of ordinary people, instead of the glamorous life enjoyed by the upper echelons in Old Shanghai. Therefore, it is a vital narrative component in accommodating ordinary, everyday experience in the *longtang*.

Gossip also entails a vital class dimension. By deploying gossip in *longtang* houses, Wang focuses her story of Shanghai on the city’s underclass,

at the grassroots level of society. By using *longtang* and the narrative frameworks provided by gossip, Wang shows that she is capable of perceiving the city from the perspectives of its *longtang* residents. In this way, Wang's translation of Shanghai sets up an anti-thesis to any official interpretation of the city. Her story problematises the romantic translations of Old Shanghai exhibited in the writing of her contemporaries, who often view Old Shanghai from the perspective of the city's bourgeois class. In the case of Chen Naishan, for instance, she writes Old Shanghai stories (about her family) from the perspective of a granddaughter of a famous banker in the 1940s. More importantly, this chapter-long discussion of gossip is not only used to establish the significance of class and those grassroots perspectives mentioned above, but also it underlines the linguistic style of the author. Wang's narrative voice is detailed and longwinded. At times, the narrator assimilates herself into the community of the city's *longtang*, speaking as if she is gossiping. This is particularly the case when the narrator turns from an objective third-person voice to a conversational second-person perspective in her description of Long Legs, the eventual murderer of the protagonist:

Long Legs had been making his living exchanging money on the black market for quite some time. Don't look down on currency exchange, it's a real job—he even had business cards printed up! These money changers were all men of integrity; if you go and check, you'd find that they weren't the ones who swindled people—it was always the small-time players who had somehow weaseled their way into the business who did that kind of thing. Every profession has its imposters. But real money changers have regular clients who can attest to their character (TSES 387).

Here the narrator discusses Long Legs' profession in great detail. This makes the whole account sound like the everyday gossip that takes place in the *longtang*. Even Long Legs, the name of the character, suggests a

misunderstanding in terms of his identity; a fact spread through gossip and half-truths.⁶⁴ And the change from a third-person to a second-person narrator enforces the impression that this is a random conversation between the narrator and the reader, if not among *longtang* neighbours themselves. Although this second-person narrative is immediately reminiscent of the “you” used in McInerney’s novel, the implication here is different. With this use of the second-personal voice, the narrator attempts to establish some credibility concerning her knowledge of Long Legs’ profession through a gossip-like style of language. It appears suspicious to suggest that a piece of gossip is credible. However, by addressing the reader as “you”, the narrator gives the impression that she is trying to establish a more intimate relationship with the reader than usual. Such a shift of narrative voice deliberately disrupts the slightly more formal tone registered by a third-person narrative. Addressing the reader as “you” has turned the reader into a more active listener of this particular narrative description. Although the conversation between the narrator and the reader is purely one way, Wang’s change to second-person narrative enforces a sense of trust between the narrator and the reader. To a certain extent, the narrator has made the reader believe that she has some insider’s knowledge of the trade and that her source of information is worth trusting.

Wang’s gossip-like style of language and the information provided by the narrator establishes the narrator’s authority with the information regarding Long Legs. What further credits this gossip is the narrator’s analysis of these “money-exchangers”. Frequently regarded as outlaws by the authorities, the narrator seems to show a different attitude towards the money-exchangers here

⁶⁴ “Long Legs” is so named because he is taller than average. However, this does not suggest that his legs are longer than would be considered normal. The nickname does not tell the scientific truth of his height, but it does indicate his taller-than-average feature.

by suggesting that they “were all men of integrity”. Such a point of view immediately differentiates the narrator’s stand from any official, centrifugal perspective, validating her use of gossip as a vital centripetal source of information, thus bringing her closer to the narrative’s *longtang* residents and to the reader.

This notion of gossip is cleverly used throughout the novel. It is emphasized again in the plotting of the protagonist’s death. In the plot, the protagonist is murdered by Long Legs, a friend-turned-burglar, who firmly believes that Qiyao has got some gold bars at home. Ironically, however, Long Legs gains this information through gossip and rumour. In this light, Qiyao can be understood to die, primarily, as a direct result of gossip. Such a plot not only emphasizes the intricacy of gossip in creating drama in the world of the *longtang*, but also calls into question the reliability of the whole story. This use of gossip reveals an inherent tension between fiction and reality, which is purposefully intended by the author. The author has always regarded *The Song* as a fictitious account of the saga of Old Shanghai. She claims in an interview with Zhang Xudong:

I am a writer of fiction. All the settings and things in my story are fictitious. To overstress my relationship with Shanghai is to impose the restrictions of the real over me. The danger of fiction-writing is that it is prone to be limited by the real. This is especially so for me since I am a realist, I am easily led to talk about the real (by my readers). So I need to stress again that my literary creation is purely fictional (Letters 180).

Given these explanations, the purpose of gossip in Wang’s narrative appears to be multi-faceted. It indicates a narrative perspective that is established on the basis of an underclass identity. It shows a narrative style that is accentuated by elaborate details and flowery exaggerations. It also suggests the central motif

of storytelling as a fundamentally fictitious construction. In contradistinction to its realistic representation of everyday life and the accurate details contained within its *longtang* histories, Wang's novel is, fundamentally, an intricately constructed gossip-like story whose credibility becomes doubtful. This narrative strategy reveals the mockery that lies at the centre of Wang Anyi's story. In constructing a believable saga of Old Shanghai in the manner of her literary contemporaries, she actually questions the credibility of realist depictions of Old Shanghai by her contemporary writers.

As with her treatment of the *longtang* and gossip, it takes Wang an entire chapter to portray the city's pigeons. There has always been a tradition for local residents in the *longtang* to raise and keep pigeons on their balconies. Pigeons bring movement to the stillness of the city, forming a unique view of Shanghai's skyline. Yet pigeons are used here mainly to offer a panoramic view of the city and its people as a way to encompass everything, minute or grand, in its view. Such an all-seeing, mobile perspective is achieved, necessarily for Wang's panoptic interpretation of the city, without overlooking the more mundane details of life. It forms the "centrifugal" axis of the narrator's omniscient perspective in observing Shanghai. As the narrator explicitly expresses in offering her own understanding of pigeons in this chapter:

They are the only living beings that can look down upon this city. Who can observe this city more clearly and distinctly than they? They are witnesses to unsolved mysteries without number. How many secrets they must hold in their eyes! As they soar above the city with its countless buildings, they gather up the scenes in the windows—these, though only scenes from everyday life, by their sheer mass pile up into a soul-stirring vista. Actually the pigeons are the only ones who can appreciate the true essence of this city (*TSES* 18).

Such a panoramic perspective is important for the author to bring together multi-stranded plots in this densely-packed novel. For Wang, pigeons are the true living witnesses to the city's vicissitudes and offer, therefore, an apparent overview of the city. There is nothing that can be hidden from their omniscient eyes. In addition, they are mobile. Flying high above the city, the perspectives they offer establish an advantageous position from which the reader is afforded a panoramic view of the city. Whilst this interpretation of pigeons might sound romanticized and anthropomorphic, it calls attention to the way in which these birds allow the author to demonstrate the omniscient perspective requisite to observing the city, therefore establishing her authority in interpreting Shanghai.

Importantly, by revealing the omniscience of pigeons the author has implicitly suggested that the ending of the novel, as well as the destiny of its protagonist, has already been determined. In this sense, the protagonist's death, is not totally unexpected:

Only the pigeons would bear witness. They are the offspring of those birds of four decades before; generation after generation, their line never stops and everything is recorded in their eyes. You can hear them cooing and know that their nightmares are born of the nights of man. How many unsolved crimes there are in this city, all committed during those late-night hours in the long, dark Longtang alleys that run like cracks through the city, never to see the light of day (TSES 428).

It is my argument that we cannot fully understand the protagonist's death without considering the perspective of the pigeons who bear witness to her demise. From this critical perspective, Wang's efforts to detail the protagonist's delicate lifestyle in Shanghai in the past and the present cannot now be understood as a nostalgic remembrance of *longtang* life but, rather, serve to deliver a carefully-devised irony that satirises the kind of personality nurtured by such an environment. Chen Sihe argues that the death of Wang's protagonist

signifies the end of “a nostalgic dream enwrapping Wang Qiyao” (397). Indeed, such an interpretation validates the rather unexpected, scandalous death of Wang Qiyao, revealing the author’s purpose of using her novel as a satire of the public’s blind obsession with Old Shanghai sagas. And this is a point that will be explored fully in the next section.

Although Wang’s and Wei’s novels share certain formal similarities in revealing the East/West influences on Shanghai, Wang’s intricate construction of different narrative perspectives in *The Song* marks the essential difference between her and Wei. Importantly, what makes such an East/West motif particularly relevant in the novels of both writers—and indeed in 1990s Shanghai fiction in general—is the dramatic social transformation taking place within the city since the early 1990s. In the 1990s Shanghai attracted a great number of foreigners and the city’s expatriate community started to resemble that of the 1930s.⁶⁵ Transnational romances and marriages began happening more frequently and became increasingly accepted by local people. As the Shanghai Statistical *Yearbook 2009* shows, there was a steady rise in the figure of Chinese-foreign marriages, reaching 3,107 in 1996, the highest in the decade.⁶⁶ In this sense, Wei’s transnational love story can be regarded as a reflection of such social changes.

Alongside the growth in Shanghai’s foreign population, the growing establishment of global companies from the West also contributed to changes in the city’s urban communities. The *Lujiazui* area of Pudong District attracted many big names in international finance—companies such as Citibank,

⁶⁵ The earliest data on Shanghai’s foreign, expatriate population was collected in 2005. The number was 100,011. It climbed to 152,104 in 2008. See Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau and NBS Survey Office in Shanghai, “3.14 Resident Foreigners in Shanghai in Main Years”.

⁶⁶ See Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau and NBS Survey Office in Shanghai, “3.13 Chinese-Foreign Marriage (1990-2008)”.

Goldman Sachs, and Merrill Lynch and Morgan Stanley all opened their offices in 1990s Shanghai (Yatsko 58). According to Yatsko, “by 1996, some foreign commercial banks had established branches, 30% of the country’s total, and another 119 foreign financial service firms had set up representative offices. By early 1999, the number of foreign banks with Shanghai branches had climbed to 64” (59). These foreign establishments in 1990s Shanghai formed the backdrop to Wei’s representation of the Westernized lifestyle in *Shanghai Baby* and triggered Wang’s imagining of a different Shanghai. Evidently, exposure to foreigners and foreign establishments in Shanghai necessarily led to a series of reactions in terms of literary creation. And both authors have echoed these social changes in their own ways.

Commodifying Female Sexuality and Old Shanghai Nostalgia

Given this social context, the narrator’s dramatic comparison between Coco’s impotent Chinese boyfriend and her very potent German lover means that *Shanghai Baby* is for many readers a direct metaphor for tensions between East and West in contemporary Shanghai. *Shanghai Baby* is often read as a story that suggests a total subversion of Chinese tradition, or a direct challenge to Chinese patriarchal power. The contrast between Tian Tian and Mark only enforces such an impression of cultural subversion. Nevertheless as the author argued in an interview:

People talk about the book on the Internet, and I get very strong attacks from male readers, who think that it is a simple story of West conquering East, [...] Because Tian Tian is impotent and Mark’s very potent, they think it’s critical of Chinese men. Female readers often feel more sympathetic. They say it’s the kind of story they would tell about their lives if they could tell

their stories, and they encourage me not to give up. The book sold very well in China before the ban, which proves that it has reflected some of the feelings of the young generation in China, especially Chinese women and their emotions, their confusions and desires (Wei, interview).

To use Tian Tian and Mark as two symbolic images to represent East and West may not be the original intention of the author. Yet such an interpretation partially validates itself at a time when the influences from the West were infiltrating the city. In the 1990s, Shanghai saw a proliferation of Western architecture, culture, and art accompanying the advent of global consumerism. *Lujiazui* in Pudong District was not the only place in the city that was dotted with Western-style skyscrapers. The city has embraced Western transformations across most of its districts. For example, the idea of gentrification was introduced to help preserve local *longtang* neighbourhoods in central Shanghai. *Xintiandi*, originally a *longtang* neighbourhood in Huai Hai Road, was refurbished in 1996 into a commercial block that accommodated Western restaurants, bars, shops and, importantly, Western consumers. The increasing exposure to Western culture and Westerners marked the 1990s as the decade in which Shanghai needed to reposition itself on the East/West axis. Therefore, at the time of its publication *Shanghai Baby* posed a huge challenge to the authorities who were watchful of tendencies towards Westernization in Chinese culture. This cultural anxiety can be observed in the comments made by China's state media at the time. *People's Daily*, a Chinese state newspaper, offered a harsh critique of Wei and other "pretty women" writers:

these pretty women writers, who have split from the solid foundation of Chinese creative writing and the rich historic and cultural background of Chinese literature, who know a smattering of Marguerite Duras and Henry Miller and dare jump

onto the stage to do a striptease, will eventually feel ashamed of themselves (qtd. in Smith).

At the centre of this critique we can identify a paternalistic tendency towards social control that continues to dominate Chinese culture. *Shanghai Baby* is clearly regarded here as a challenge to this patriarchal control. However, while Wei regards herself as a “feminist helping her generation of women understand themselves” (Smith), she is not in actual fact committed to upholding any particular feminist politics. Her representation of Shanghai wavers between a burgeoning feminist consciousness and its dominant patriarchal influences. This can be perceived from her description of the city’s landmark: “the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, Asia’s tallest. Its long, long steel column pierces the sky, proof of the city’s phallus worship” (SB 16). To use the continent’s tallest building as a metaphor for Shanghai’s reverence for phallic ideals shows the narrator’s acknowledgement, and even consent, of such patriarchal dominance, as well as her mockery of it.

Such an interpretation of the TV Tower implies that the patriarchal residue of China’s feudal system still reigns over Chinese women, in the sense that women are still expected to be obedient, family-orientated and to follow social conventions. Although there is a slight satire at work in Wei’s analogy between the TV Tower and a phallus, Coco seems to conform to this image of patriarchal control. For her, such phallus worship still occupies a vital position in contemporary Shanghai culture (as informed by the landmark position of the TV Tower). In this light, her pursuit of sexual liberty and her exhibitionist tendencies can be interpreted as a form of compliance within this patriarchal system of control. Instead of being an independent woman who upholds feminist ideals, Coco is depicted as one who still depends on men emotionally

and physically. Her subjectivity is established through enticing, entertaining and gratifying the men in her life. This conventional depiction of female sexuality greatly undermines Wei Hui's self-claimed "feminist" position. Her exploration of female sexual liberty is thus confined by her tendency to commodify it through satiating her male readers.

The ways in which Wei commodifies female sexuality can be regarded as similar to the representation of female sexuality offered by Candace Bushnell in *Sex and the City*. The difference is that Bushnell's commercial success relies on a powerful mass media that augments the influence of her novel. This commercial success has also been further enhanced by Bushnell's insight into female sexual psychology in contemporary New York City. By contrast, *Shanghai Baby* opens up a space in which contemporary Chinese women can publicly discuss female sexuality whilst remaining within a relatively repressed social environment. Her novel was published at a time when a distinctly feminist consciousness was growing, following Shanghai's economic transformation. It echoed a trend of writings concerned with female sexual liberty in 1990s China. And the commercial success of Wei's novel was further secured by the marketing opportunities triggered by its ban.

Wei's description of female sexuality bears clear marks of Western influences. At times, the author's style of language shows a connection between her writing and the writing of contemporary Western novelists. For example, it is interesting to note that Wei Hui quotes and refers to *Sex and the City* in *Marrying Buddha*. A similar sense of the worship of consumer culture that so obsesses the characters in Bushnell's book can also be found in the pages of *Marrying Buddha*. Buying Jimmy Choos and visiting the famous bars

mentioned in *Sex and the City*, Coco becomes an out-and-out follower of feminised American popular culture. At times, her way of portraying New York City (and Shanghai) resembles Bushnell's writing style in *Sex and the City*. One can almost discern an attempt at pastiche here:

speaking of the New York dating scene, I'd never seen such a depressing city. The men of this city were unique on the planet. Much of the time their testosterone-driven quest for supremacy was exciting, but even more often their selfishness and insecurity left one feeling hopeless. In Woody Allen films and in episodes of *Sex and the City* you could see the shadows of these people. There are physically, emotionally and financially healthy and centred men in the world, but I guess they aren't in New York (MB 25-26).

The satire of these New York men is reminiscent of Bushnell's style of language in *Sex and the City*. The narrator projects a powerful, feminine image of Coco through defining and categorizing the men she encounters in New York. Her judgement of male social types here strikes the reader as suspicious, given Wei Hui's limited experience of men in New York. Her impression of them is less the result of a direct personal experience than a culturally acquired one. Although the author, like Coco, stayed in New York City and may even have had her own romantic encounters with men in New York, it is still unlikely that Wei's experience with men is substantial enough for her to deliver such a judgement. It is more likely that Wei Hui acquires such an impression through the mass media, or even through Bushnell's own writing.

Such a connection between Wei Hui and Bushnell further strengthens the impression of Wei's conformity to Western popular culture. Crucially, her evocation of such Western cultural influences occurred at a time in the 1990s when there was a vacuum in China's cultural life. Shao argues that "the production of 'Pretty Women' literature shows the awkward situation Chinese

literature was in when confronted with a ‘transitional’ phase”. During this period Shanghai, and indeed the whole of China, was anxiously repositioning itself after a cultural vacuum was created as a result of the Cultural Revolution. Along with other “pretty women” texts, Wei Hui’s novel exemplified the cultural disorientation of contemporary Chinese, especially the younger generations. They also marked the birth of a group of market-conscious and market-oriented writers in contemporary China.

However, to claim that Wei Hui’s commercial success was simply the result of a market accident is not a fair judgement. Admittedly, her mesmerizing style of language has given Wei a better commercial edge than her contemporaries in both novels, but particularly in *Shanghai Baby*. The exaggerated diction she uses to express the sexual desires of modern Chinese women, as well as her poetic account of Coco’s passionate relationships with two men, can be interpreted as Wei’s creative contribution to China’s “pretty women” literature and to the global “chick lit”:

I soon came to adore his sweet kiss and gentle touch. Kissing with the tip of the tongue is like ice-cream melting. It was he who taught me that a kiss has a soul and colours all of its own. Kind, loving and trusting as a dolphin, it was his temperament that captured my wild heart. What he couldn’t give me—sharp cries or explosive pleasure, sexual pride or orgasm—lost significance (SB 5-6).

This description of the sensual experience is more than a realistic one; influenced, effectively, by images mostly imported from Western popular culture. The interpretation of physical feelings is more culturally constructed than individually grounded. And it is tinged with an element of imaginative exaggeration from the author. For instance, kisses have long been identified by Western popular culture as representing something intimate and sweet, something that arouses positive sensual associations. The “sweet kisses” and

“gentle touch” are also images that were initially championed by consumer culture. However, the “ice-cream melting” metaphor reveals the literary creativity of the author. Although ice-cream connotes a Western food, Wei Hui has successfully brought two irrelevant but equally pleasant sensuous experiences together in this descriptive passage. This sensuous association enhances the representation of kisses and can be regarded as Wei’s contribution to culturally constructed images of kissing.

Another important aspect that makes *Shanghai Baby* so commercially successful can be identified in that the fact of its publication, at a time when there was an “increasing fever for ‘Old Shanghai nostalgia’” (Shao). Shao Yanjun argues that prior to *Shanghai Baby*, there were “a large number of publications on Old Shanghai which achieved great commercial success and they set up an excellent example for other publishers”. Although *Shanghai Baby* is set in contemporary Shanghai, Wei’s references to Old Shanghai establish a connection between the two periods in the city’s history. Such a connection depends heavily on the consumer culture that has been passed down from Old Shanghai and has become an important feature of contemporary Shanghai in the 1990s.

For example, Wei’s description of bars, cafés, restaurants, themed parties and brand names in *Shanghai Baby* not only discloses the picture of a global consumer culture prevailing in 1990s Shanghai, but it also draws attention to the way in which contemporary Shanghai has inherited its consumer culture from the city’s semi-colonial era. For Wei Hui, Shanghai’s consumer culture is almost interchangeable with the Western heritage that pervaded Old Shanghai. The global consumer culture of contemporary

Shanghai is not only reminiscent of Old Shanghai's cultural tradition, but it is also synonymous with Westernization.

The resonance of Western consumer culture between the 1930s and the contemporary period further contextualizes Wei's depiction of female sexuality through Coco. Her indulgent lifestyle, signified through having sex promiscuously and taking drugs, strengthens such a connection. Taking drugs and having sex randomly are behaviours that are often thought to be related to Western influences. They are generally discarded by China's socialist cultural ideologies. Such a representation of Coco's indulgent lifestyle makes her reminiscent of Shanghai's sexual past. In this sense, Wei Hui has catered for a public fascination with Old Shanghai nostalgia. As Farrer has commented:

books on the colonial past are best-sellers in Shanghai. Bars and restaurants deck themselves in 1930s nostalgia. Shanghainese thus understand their "sexual opening" simultaneously as a contemporary "foreign influence" as well as the "rekindling of old embers" of Shanghai's own sexual past (5).

The embedded connection between female sexual liberty, contemporary Shanghai's consumer culture and Old Shanghai's Western heritage makes Coco a symbolic metaphor capable of bringing the city's past and present, as well as its Westernization and contemporary consumer culture together. Although Wei's references to Old Shanghai are limited, her novel establishes a lineage between Old Shanghai and contemporary Shanghai through the character of Coco. And Coco's personal worship of the flourishing 1930s is representative of the contemporary public fascination with Old Shanghai sagas.

Similarly, Wang's *The Song* was published at around the time that Old Shanghai nostalgia was being heavily exploited by many of her contemporaries. Cheng Naishan, for example, published a few novels and works of non-fiction

based on her family memoirs of Old Shanghai before Wang's novel made its appearance. As I have mentioned in my Introduction, Cheng's *Blue House* (1983) and *The Banker* (1990) were among the first novels to capitalize on Old Shanghai history. They were followed by Chen Danyan's *Shanghai Memorabilia* (1998), *Shanghai Princess* (1999), and *Shanghai Beauty* (2000). These novels reinforced Old Shanghai nostalgia among the public, which soon became a popular theme in literary, cultural and commercial life of the city.

In literary life, the excavation of Old Shanghai history was furthered through the reprinting of 1920s-40s Shanghai writers. Writers such as Zhang Ailing (i.e. Eileen Chang), Lin Yutang, and Xu Zhimo were reprinted and became popular among contemporary readers. Accompanying this literary trend which capitalized on Old Shanghai literature was an intensified commodification of Old Shanghai images and histories in cultural industries. Films such as *Shanghai Triad* (1995, dir. Zhang Yimou), *Temptress Moon* (1996, dir. Chen Kaige), *Shanghai Chronicle* (1998, dir. Peng Xiaolian) and *In the Mood for Love* (2000, dir. Wong Kar-wai) all resonated with this trend for Old Shanghai nostalgia. In the commercial world, many shops began to sell Old Shanghai posters, antiques and souvenirs. Western-style *café* shops mushroomed and some of them were decorated and themed in an Old Shanghai style to attract business. *Cafés* like Shanghai 1920 in Huangpu District, Old-Shanghai-themed 1930s Shanghai Fengqing Street (which is located in the underground market of the People's Square) and, more recently, the fairly elitist former abattoir-turned 1933 Arts and Creative Hubs in north Bund are typical examples of such commodification of Old Shanghai imagery and history.

The literary, cultural and commercial exploitations of these images of Old Shanghai, which deliberately used Shanghai as a brand name, were appearing at a time when Shanghai re-embraced the global consumer culture that had formerly shaped its urban environment in the 1930s. This sense of historical repetition provided a venue for former capitalists and capitalist descendants (such as Cheng Naishan) to write about their family stories in Old Shanghai; stories which had been repressed during the Cultural Revolution as a result of their bourgeois elements. This reconstruction of Old Shanghai history transformed the sense of nostalgia into a public sentiment within the contemporary period. It encouraged a public imagining of Old Shanghai as, vitally, a way to imagine the future of the city. As Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase argue:

Nostalgia becomes possible at the same time as utopia. The counterpart to the imagined future is the imagined past. But there is one crucial respect in which the power of the past is different. It has generated objects, images, and texts which can be seen as powerful talismans of how things used to be (9).

Chase's analysis of nostalgia as utopia summarizes the disorientation that permeates 1990s Shanghai. The "socioeconomic shock" (X. Zhang, *Postsocialism* 186) in the 1990s resulted in a search for cultural roots and a repositioning of cultural identities among the Shanghainese. Therefore, the nostalgia established by romanticizing Old Shanghai history offered a channel for the public to pursue the tradition, heritage and sense of connection that they perceived to be passed down from capitalist Old Shanghai to the city's present-day, globalised consumerism. Investigating the "generational" nostalgic film, Fredric Jameson argues that nostalgia opens up the space for a "rather different self-concept of 'postmodernism'" (296). Jameson thinks that nostalgia occurs

in popular arts as an active response to the modern changes experienced by capitalistic societies. This is suggestive of nostalgia's subtle, critiquing quality as societies become confronted with the transition towards a more extensively commercialized world. The "postmodernism" within nostalgia is in fact signified by its critique of modern memory and history. Old Shanghai nostalgia serves, in this context, as a response to the shared collective desire for re-positioning. And Old Shanghai images, histories, and stories provide tangible references out of which the Shanghainese public can construct their imaginations of the future. At the same time, these Old Shanghai images and stories channel the public's dissatisfaction with the intensity of the city's economic reform, which renders itself as disruptive and overwhelming.

However, it is largely a misinterpretation to read Wang's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* as a novel which echoes this literary trend for Old Shanghai nostalgia. Vitally, Wang starts her Shanghai story not "in the flourishing 1930s, but in late 1945, when Japan had surrendered and the 'Paris of the East' danced its last colonial tango before the communist liberation" (Choy). The year of 1945 was a time when foreign concessions were returned to the *Kuomintang*, or the Chinese Nationalist Party. Shanghai became a Chinese city in Chinese hands. To use this year as the starting point of her story, Wang actually breaks away from such stereotypical Old Shanghai stories. She has, instead, constructed a Shanghai history that indicates both a transition away from, as well as a continuity with, the everyday lived experiences of its citizens during this period.

As I have argued earlier, *The Song* did not receive immediate critical attention until five years after its publication. Although the author has never

admitted that her story was set in Old Shanghai, the novel was able to achieve huge commercial success as a result of the popular trend of nostalgic writing at the time—a success that heavily relied on the market fever for commodifying Old Shanghai through nostalgia. In a way, Wang’s “reliable excavation and description of Old Shanghai’s historical details” (S. Chen 379) was welcomed by a market with a prevalent fascination with Old Shanghai stories. Her heightened form of historical realism and extensive references to everyday Old Shanghai experience make her novel full of the linguistic codes of Old Shanghai. As she half-heartedly claims in interview, referring to the achievement of her novel: “[...] unexpectedly, [...] the novel has suddenly attracted great attention. [...] I am surprised myself that the novel is full of fictional codes, that it almost becomes a tourist guide for Shanghai” (A. Wang, interview). Such unintentional references to Shanghai through “fictional codes”, by which she meant the various realistic images and motifs of Old Shanghai, form the large part of the novel and result in the majority of Wang’s readers believing that her novel is one that is centrally concerned with Old Shanghai.

In fact, Wang often feels offended when critics try to position *The Song* as submitting to Old Shanghai fever, claiming in defence that the novel “is talking about Shanghai in the 1940s” (Gan). Wang’s resistance to being stereotyped can also be perceived from her disagreement with critic David Der-wei Wang, who claims that *The Song* bears the legacy of Zhang Ailing, a major actor of the “Shanghai School” (Haipai) of writers active in the 1940s. He believes that Wang is the successor to the “Shanghai School” writers. Wang Anyi rejected such a categorization on more than one occasion. She has explicitly stated that “I may never write as beautifully as her [Zhang Ailing],

but my world is larger than hers” (qtd. in S. Chen 383). Wang’s reference to a larger world in fact refers to her ideological ground. Born to a family of Communist Party cadres, who “entered the city [of Shanghai] as revolutionary victors” (S. Chen 400), Wang represents a generation of writers who were deeply influenced by Chinese Communist ideology. For them, Old Shanghai is a symbol of decadence, corruption and Western imperialism.

Chen Sihe believes that Wang has been deeply influenced by leftist writers and bears the markings of the leftist tradition. This sharply distinguishes her from writers such as Zhang Ailing whose representation of war-ridden Old Shanghai is full of apocalyptic nihilism. Wang has an entirely different scope and vision contained within her interpretation of Shanghai. For her, what defines the city is its resilience, its pragmatism, and its down-to-earth pursuit of materialism. These characteristics are entailed in everyday *longtang* experience and form the spiritual core that sustains the city through its various political and ideological reconfigurations. In an interview with Zhang Xudong, Wang Anyi further stresses her own ideological position as a writer. She refers to herself as a “product of the Republic” (*Letters* 184). Wang sees herself as bearing the ideological marks of Communist China. This means that her depiction of Shanghai must surpass the nihilism portrayed by Zhang Ailing and reveal the scope and vision of a new regime, since she regards it her responsibility to represent new China.

In this light, Wang’s *The Song* should not merely be read as a novel that complies with the trend of Old Shanghai nostalgia. Instead, it should be understood as a “satire of the Old Shanghai nostalgia prevalent among people at that time” (S. Chen 379). And Wang’s realistic representation of those

historical details associated with Old Shanghai is precisely the basis upon which she anchors her satire. Indeed, the whole novel aims to create a realistic ambience of Old Shanghai. And this is achieved through Wang's omnipotent perspectival inner eye and her elaborated narrative style, both of which unleash the intricacies of the *longtang* life, its resilience and its timelessness.

It is interesting to note, that since 2000, Wang's unexpected literary success has been further bolstered by a market that remains hungry for Old Shanghai sagas. *The Song* was presented on stage by the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre in 2004, appeared on screen in an adaptation directed by Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan in 2005, and was adapted for TV by Ding Hei in 2006. Still immersed in Old Shanghai fever, the city continues to provide an extended market that is eager to consume commodified images featuring Old Shanghai nostalgia. In this vein, Wang's novel can be regarded as a fine example in revealing the tendencies towards nostalgic commodification that exist within contemporary Shanghai. Functioning as a satire against Old Shanghai nostalgia, its central motif is compromised by the market's eagerness to embrace global consumerism. The novel is frequently read more as a reinforcement of Old Shanghai nostalgia rather as a critique of it. The fact that the novel has quickly been commodified by a fast-expanding consumer culture in contemporary Shanghai reveals the public imagination of Shanghai summarized by Zhang Xudong:

Through this consumers' nostalgia, Shanghai becomes a city resisting the nation, a culture resisting politics, a historical narrative resisting the imposition of a utopian design of social totality. It is the fascination with the superficial and frivolous that enables Wang to delve deep into the heart of Shanghai as a private interiority, a dream, and a nostalgic utopia (*Postsocialism* 190).

Zhang has revealed how a public obsession with Old Shanghai has made the city a centre of fascination, a place of exoticism and an imaginary utopia. Apparently, both *Shanghai Baby* and *The Song* gained sustained popularity at a time when the need to commodify Old Shanghai nostalgia and female sexuality outweighed any critical reflection upon them. And it is exactly this “fascination with the superficial and frivolous” that enables Wei Hui and her generation of writers to imbue a sense of veneration for such Old Shanghai histories. Meanwhile, this obsession is also the very trend that Wang Anyi intends to satirise and it forms what triggers her story of Shanghai. In this sense, Wang and Wei demonstrate two different literary responses to the trend of commodifying Old Shanghai nostalgia. On the one hand, Wang represents an intellectual consciousness that resists the commodification and romanticization of Old Shanghai nostalgia, while on the other hand Wei stands for a younger generation of writers who maintain a more amicable relationship with the market and who know how to play the system to their own advantage.

Political Blankness and Materiality: The Shanghai ‘Personality’

The Western media has often interpreted the dramatic ban and subsequent burning of *Shanghai Baby* in ideological terms, assuming that the government behaved in this way in order to prevent the ideological transformation intended by literary works like Wei’s novel. Wei’s editor, An Boshun, has been quoted by Smith with regards to this issue: “‘It’s an ideological matter,’ he said, declining to discuss it further”. Smith elaborates upon this comment, comparing the burning of *Shanghai Baby* to the famous historical incident

happening in Qing Dynasty China, in which the “Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi [...] burned all the books in the realm in an attempt to unify thought” (Smith).

However, *Shanghai Baby* is hardly an ideologically imposing novel propagating a political agenda. On the contrary, Wei tries to show an apolitical personality in the character of Coco, who represents for her an important trait of the Shanghai ‘personality’. For example, when there is a quarrel concerning politics between two friends of different nationalities, a Chinese man named Yisha and an American man called Johnson, Coco avoids engaging in the conflict. When these two characters sustain a heated argument about the political decisions of each other’s governments, Coco does not say anything. Her silence serves as a strong contrast to the reactions of Tian Tian or Madonna, both of whom attempt to resolve this conflict by intervening: “The international incident over, the show went on. Tian Tian offered his flower, poem and self to me, and I did the same to him” (SB 262). Coco’s indifference to the conflict and her sole focus upon her own romance, as well as her half-hearted joke about the dispute, contests the notion that the novel intends to make ideological claims. In fact, Coco’s apparently apolitical attitude continues in *Marrying Buddha*, in which her ignorance of the protest in Barcelona emphasizes once more this apolitical personality:

‘What are they doing?’ I asked nervously. ‘Protesting.’ Susan looked worried too. ‘Why are they protesting?’ ‘Hard to say. Probably the problems in the Middle East.’ ‘Yeah, must be,’ I said. In my heart I knew that Susan and I would never understand those politics, those wars with their wild bursts of testosterone (MB 168).

While this over-simplified, gendered interpretation of wars as “bursts of testosterone” is merely entertaining, it also demonstrates the protagonist’s indifference towards, and ignorance of, political issues. Such blankness in the

protagonist's political judgements informs us of a characteristic trait of Shanghai citizens whose indifference to politics is a cultural construction that can be identified throughout the city's history. And this apolitical personality has been exacerbated by the highly commercialized environment in 1990s Shanghai.

The history of Shanghai as a city of migrants which was later controlled by different foreign and domestic forces has cultivated a culture of tolerance. Such a culture places great importance on commerce, rather than politics. Chen Danyan has made a comparison of Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton) when foreign forces first arrived at the two port cities. She points out that compared to the Cantonese who poisoned and fought against foreigners when they first arrived, the Shanghainese appeared to be more civilized and tolerant. Chen believes that the open-mindedness and friendliness of the Shanghainese were perhaps among the reasons why Shanghai, instead of Guangzhou, became a world city in the early twentieth century (D. Chen 222-24). The predominantly apolitical personality of the Shanghainese can also be regarded as extending a heritage that developed with its historical period of foreign concessions. When the city was controlled by the Japanese, French, American, British and Chinese Nationalist governments simultaneously, it bred a plebeian culture that was flexible, tolerant and commerce-oriented.

In contrast to the apolitical aspect of their local culture, the Shanghainese have placed a great emphasis on commerce. Li Tiangang believes that Shanghai plebeian culture has been "deeply influenced by the nineteenth century British industrial and commercial culture" (377). This has been fortified by the presence of many financial, commercial and industrial

establishments in the city's history. The consumer culture described by 1940s writers such as Zhang Ailing has particularly contributed to the impression that consumerism has become an integral part of Shanghai's personality. Her description of the local Shanghainese places great emphasis on the bourgeois lifestyle they enjoyed in the 1940s. In the 1990s, such an apolitical attitude was furthered by the city's rapidly-expanding consumerism. The public psyche of the 1990s in Shanghai was defined by "competitions and desires to get rich" (Li 380). Given this social atmosphere, it seems only logical that Coco is represented as a politically blank character. In the face of clashes between Eastern and Western ideologies, Coco's political neutrality serves as a way of preserving her individuality and enjoying more freedom and liberty.

A similar kind of blankness also appears in McInerney's and Bushnell's characters. The depthless characters in their novels are nurtured by an intensified commodification in the cultural life of New York City. Their obsession with surfaces and their fetishization of commodities form the main theme of novels which are accompanied by little discussion of politics. However, Coco's blasé attitude towards politics has different implications. Firstly, it can be understood as articulating a characteristic of Shanghai citizens that has been inherited from the city's former semi-colonial period. It also represents the disorientation of Wei's generation in a fast-changing metropolis where communism reigns officially while in reality capitalism steals its way into people's lives. Coco's silence thus reveals a choice which avoids making any clear statement of her own political attitudes. Viewed within the larger social context, this can be understood as representative of the broader attitudes of Shanghai residents towards the competition between capitalism and

socialism in the contemporary period. Although the city's residents enjoy the benefits of a capitalist market contained within a relatively stable socialist state, it is nonetheless less important for them to care about the political regime of the city at all. Political complacency, hence, becomes a choice that guarantees their individual freedom and liberty.

In addition, Wei's use of a first-person narrative also reveals the ways in which political ideologies are exchanged for a complacency that ensures individuality and freedom. In this case, the subjectivity of "I" advances the protagonist's individualistic lifestyle, a feature that is in contrast to the collectivism championed by Chinese culture. On a technical level, the first-person narrative also maintains the momentum of the author's passionate discussion of female sexuality:

I closed my eyes and listened to him moan a sentence or two in indistinct German, sounds from my dreams that struck the most sensitive part of my womb. I thought I could die and he would keep on going, but then I climaxed with a sharp cry (*SB* 71).

Although this description may be imbued with literary metaphors and artistic exaggeration here, the perspective of the "I" offers the reader a direct, personal and immediate means of understanding the impact of the protagonist's sensual experience. The first-person narrative helps to illustrate the protagonist's personal experience to the reader by allowing them to play the role of Coco. It thus enhances the impression of sexual gratification. Yet the emotional appeal of such a bold and straightforward message only becomes more persuasive to the reader when the narrator deploys the confessional tone of "I" in showing the mental conflict after she has sex with Mark, her German lover, in a woman's lavatory:

I began to cry. This was all so inexplicable. I was increasingly

losing my self-confidence, and suddenly felt even cheaper than the prostitutes dancing downstairs. At least they had professionalism and a certain coolness (sic), while I was awkward and horribly torn between two personalities. I couldn't stand the face I saw reflected in the grimy mirror. Something in my body had been lost, leaving a gaping hole (*SB* 84).

An obvious conflict can be recognized between the idiosyncratic, yet graphic depiction of Coco's sexual experience and this self-debasing, frustrated and moralistic reflection upon herself. However, it is not unusual for such emotional range to occur within a narrative's first-person perspective of the "I". The whimsicality and willfulness of "I", as opposed to other personal pronouns, has more capacity to incorporate apparent contradictions in the protagonist's character, suggesting a sense of confusion and disorientation. Importantly, when considered within Shanghai's still restrictive social environment this gap between moral and physical pursuits, as mediated by the first-person narrative, indicates that this conflict is perhaps not just particular to Coco, but symbolic of the general personality of the city. The confession Coco makes seems to imply that while her body is ready, her mind is not. In this sense, Coco's individual dilemma can perhaps be understood as symbolic of the larger social and cultural dilemma in contemporary Shanghai: the West may be well on its way to influencing the city and transforming its Chinese cultural traditions, but the latter is not yet ready for such a transformation. Conveyed through the formal features of the first-person narrative voice, the protagonist's mind-body gap thus reveals the problematic issue of East-West cultural encounters in 1990s Shanghai.

Notably, while the emotional appeal that Wei constructs can be rendered through the "I" voice, the subjectivity of this narrative perspective undermines its reliability. The first-person narrative voice is often regarded as

less reliable than a third-person narrative, as a result of its subjectivity. It is important to note that Wei's first-person narrative switches to a third-person narrative perspective at times, establishing a distance between the narrator and the protagonist and suggesting the fictitious nature of Wei's writing:

But I kept on undressing, like a stripper. [...] Everything I did was designed to create a strange new fairy tale, a fairy tale meant just for me and the boy I adored. The boy sat entranced against the railing, sad but grateful, watching the girl dance in the moonlight. Her body was smooth as a swan's, yet powerful as a leopard's. Every feline crouch, leap and turn was elegant yet madly seductive (*SB* 17).

Although the "I" perspective is used to depict Coco's seduction of Tian Tian through a strip tease, the narrator begins to separate from the protagonist, distancing herself by referring to the protagonist as "the girl". Such a shift can be understood as further proof of the protagonist's contradictory attitudes towards her sexual freedom. It allows the narrator to maintain a comfortable distance from her exhibitionistic self, thus alleviating her uneasiness when confronting the scene directly. Another consequence of such a narrative split is that it allows the reader to view the scene in its entirety by replacing an "inward ... eye-witness" with an "outward" one (Scholes and Kellogg 256). Such a replacement creates a cinematic effect, suggesting a scenario in which the camera lens is pulled back from a close-up. Yet such a switch of narrative voice can be problematic not only in terms of the narrator's reliability but also the protagonist's identity. The price paid here is that the intimacy between the protagonist and the reader achieved by the first-person voice has been lost. "The girl" has taken the place of "I" to suggest the widening gap between the two.

The occasional separation between the narrative voices in *Shanghai Baby* is little evident for the reader to detect. It seems to be more of an unintentional switch rather than a purposeful strategy employed by the author, suggesting that Wei may have not consciously realized her own conflicting attitude towards exhibiting female sexuality openly via her protagonist. Crucially, such a formal transition also discloses a tension between the author's individualistic claims and a repressive social system that restricts the open discussion of female sexuality. While *Shanghai Baby* is often regarded as a brave attempt to speak up for the sexual freedom of modern Chinese women, it also demonstrates the inherent hesitations and dilemmas for women facing such a choice. The fact that the external environment does not at all encourage women to discuss their sexuality openly is partially responsible for such hesitations.

In *The Song*, this political blankness forms an essential trait of Shanghai and Wang Qiyao. In Wang Anyi's depiction of Shanghai between 1945 and 1986, there is a silence concerning the important political events that happened in Shanghai during that period. China's Civil War (1946-1949),⁶⁷ the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the ten year long Cultural Revolution (1967-1977) and the 1978 Reform and Opening-up Policy all had a far-reaching impact on Chinese society. Yet they are all absent from Wang's depiction of the city in the novel. As a mainstream writer, Wang is surely well aware of Shanghai's social history. Wang Qiyao, the protagonist, is

⁶⁷ The Chinese Civil War refers to the intermittent wars between China's Communist Party chaired by Mao Zedong and the *Kuomintang*, or, China's Nationalist Party chaired by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek). The war, in its broadest sense, started in 1927. It continued intermittently until the Anti-Japanese War interrupted the fighting. After the Japanese were defeated in 1945, the full-scale war between the two parties resumed, leading to a four-year long campaign that split China into the Communist Party controlled mainland China and the Nationalist Party controlled Taiwan.

certainly not living in a social and political vacuum. This textual silence thus begs the question as to why Wang chooses to ignore these major social events in her depiction of the city.

Firstly, it should be noted that traces of these epochal social events can still be felt in *The Song* by a careful reader who understands China's recent history. But they are so easily buried in the trivial details of *longtang* routines that readers are unable to associate these details with them immediately. Wang Anyi chooses to use Wang Qiyao's perspective to formulate these social histories, confined as it is to her *longtang* life and limited by her pursuit of materialism. In other words, Wang deliberately chooses a limited personal perspective through which to reveal the city's history. Therefore, the reader can only have a taste of the social tensions that were present during China's Civil War period through the character of the heavily disguised Director Li, Qiyao's lover and a high-ranking KMT official whose whereabouts can hardly be pinned down. As the plot shows, "It was another month before Director Li reappeared" (106), and Director Li's unpredictable emergence, mysterious whereabouts and sudden disappearance form the only moments in the plot through which the reader can glimpse the tensions experienced during China's Civil War. It seems that Qiyao's entire world is confined to her *longtang* romance. The outside world can hardly establish any relevance with her without Director Li.

Such an erasure of political events is intended by the author to deliver a serious purpose. The total disappearance of certain histories such as the Cultural Revolution in Wang's text indicates perhaps Wang Anyi's own ideological ground. As Xiao Jiwei argues that "[s]eeing herself an heir of May

Fourth revolutionary writers, Wang Anyi carries in her its ideological baggage” (515). By this, Xiao means that as an “heir” to those leftists who are supposed to uphold Communist ideology, Wang must feel the pressure to discuss the Cultural Revolution in her novels. Such ideological baggage also explains her chosen perspective in describing Shanghai from the mundane, everyday *longtang* perspective in order to contest the glamorous, nostalgic version of Old Shanghai being exhibited in the writing of her contemporaries. For Wang, the everyday mundane *longtang* life is what defines Old Shanghai, rather than the glittering, glamorous life of those socialites, compradors, politicians, or business tycoons represented by her contemporary writers. Wang believes that the spirit of Shanghai resides in its everyday *longtang* life, its attachment to its pragmatic pursuit of materialism. Such a spirit is sustained by characters like Wang Qiyao, “a hero of everyday life” (Choy). Qiyao survives the political turmoil by relying on the triviality of mundane everyday life as her essential anchor. Although her scope and vision of the world are exclusively confined to the *longtang*, she symbolizes the wisdom and resilience secured by *longtang* experience. This is where she draws her strength from to resist the reconfigurations and impositions made by the outside world. This is also what helps her through life’s trials and tribulations. Such resilience is fundamentally established upon her pragmatic pursuit of materialistic security, which associates her closely with the city’s commercial persona. Fundamentally, what makes Qiyao “the typical daughter of the Shanghai *longtang*” (TSES 22) is the very emotional shallowness and superficiality intrinsic to her personality:

For days afterward Director Li did not contact her. It was as if he had never existed, but there was no denying the reality of the jewelled ring. With the ring on her finger, Wang Qiyao could not help thinking about him. She was captivated (TSES 105).

Qiyao's world remains unshaken by the turbulences imposed by the outside world. Even the absence of Director Li from her life cannot create any emotional vacuum in her. All that matters to her is to maintain the ritualistic routine of her everyday life. In this light, Director Li functions merely as the provider of the material basis for her daily rituals. The "jewelled ring" becomes the only reminder of him. To some extent, Director Li is objectified through his association with the "jewelled ring" and his relationship with Qiyao becomes purely materialistic. He appears to Qiyao as an instrument, rather than as a living being. As Howard Choy comments: "Wang Qiyao is neither an all-conquering hero of the times nor a classical tragic hero against fate", but one who "knows best how to lead the urban life under all circumstances." "Such heroism", according to Choy, lies in her "immersion in the struggle for a livable life and material amenities. The materiality of the mundane world that Wang demonstrates is the city dwellers' device to distance themselves from state ideology."

Indeed, Qiyao's world is essentially concerned with the *longtang* life that she leads. The triviality of this lifestyle sustains her through the vicissitudes of life. In the plot, there is no description of Wang Qiyao's feelings towards men. She has never shown any sadness or grief over men who have left her; whether they were the generous Director Li, or the caring Mr. Cheng, or Deuce, who demonstrates a pure love and worship for her. These men are only vessels that Qiyao uses to wade through life's troubled waters. Yet it is exactly this lack of emotional depth that fortifies Wang Qiyao and renders her a metaphor for the resilience that permeates Shanghai's persona.

In this vein, Qiyao is as superficial a character as McInerney's and Ellis's protagonists. Her lack of emotional depth, according to Wang Anyi, is deeply rooted in the *longtang* life. The ritualistic worship of materialistic life by *longtang* people becomes metaphorical for the city's intrinsic personality: this is a commercial city that values things over people, and money over emotion. This shallow, depthless and heartless side of Qiyao, however, does not undermine the significance of her status as a flat and superficial individual in the city. In fact, Qiyao is exactly the kind of personality that Wang Anyi regards as crucial to understanding *longtang* people in particular, and the city in general. For Wang, this is what sustains the city through various political and ideological changes in history.

For most of the novel, Wang shows the materialistic aspect of Qiyao's life through a meticulous depiction of her daily routines. Her everyday activities, her interactions with different men, and the triviality of her *longtang* life form the large bulk of the novel. Only very occasionally, the motif of the novel surfaces:

This was the winter of 1957. The large world outside was undergoing shattering upheavals, but the small world around the stove existed in a remote corner, or perhaps a crack, of the large world, forgotten and, for this reason, safe. What a lovely scene it was—the snow drifting outside, the stove burning inside. They thought up all kinds of delightful things they could do with the stove, roasting Korean dried fish, baking pastries, scalding thinly sliced mutton in a pot of water, boiling noodles, and so forth (TSES 193).

What is particularly interesting is that the narrator's concern for the larger world is so transient and brief that the topic shifts quickly to the burning stove and dining rituals. Such a swift change of topic enforces the impression of the protagonist's apolitical attitude. The ritualistic social patterns of eating together

and reminiscing inside the neat space of Wang's apartment are set against the backdrop of an outside time of "shattering upheavals". The solidarity of this everyday experience constitutes a moment of eternity and serenity. Any outside turbulence cannot shake the solidity of this individual experience. Although Qiyao is not living in a political vacuum, her ritualistic everyday routine constructs a world that is able to resist any political or ideological impositions from the outside. The significance of upheavals in the larger world outside becomes insignificant and irrelevant to the small world contained within Qiyao's apartment.

Some of the key points distinguishing the writing of Wang Anyi from the writing of Wei Hui have become clear in the above analysis. For Wang, Old Shanghai is not merely defined by glitter and glamour. It is the *longtang* life that forms the undying strength of the city. The *longtang* spirit, for Wang, is not something that can be annihilated by political ideologies. Compared with most Old Shanghai writers, who predominantly articulate the attitude that Shanghai's history has been disrupted by such changes in political governance and ideological control as the Cultural Revolution, Wang's writing imbues Shanghai with a sense of continuity. In Wang's literary formulation, its intrinsic resilience is what helps the city through various forms of political turbulence and is what sustains its commercialist core.

Throughout *The Song*, Wang Anyi has tried to craft a *longtang* perspective that defies any official narrative. Wang's careful attention to historical details allows her to reconstruct a believable Shanghai history that enhances her argument and reveals her central motif. In Chen Sihe's words, such a *longtang* narrative appears as a "civic narrative" (*shimin xushi*) (391).

He argues that Wang's leftist position influences her firm belief that it is the culture of the common people that defines Shanghai (391). Wang Ban uses another phrase, "plebeian culture" (*shimin wenhua*) (687), to describe the *longtang* communities depicted by Wang Anyi. He believes that "it is precisely the trifles and details that form the building blocks of a livable life, a tiny strain of history that survives in the storm" (B. Wang 690). Wang Anyi's accentuation of the everyday experience of *longtang* people thus problematizes the Old Shanghai history constructed by her literary contemporaries. Wang's historical accuracy provides an anti-thesis to these dominant historical narratives, satirizing the public's fascination with Old Shanghai nostalgia.

It is at this juncture that we should reconsider the death of Wang Qiyao. If Wang Qiyao, according to Chen Sihe, is "a flat cultural symbol [...] who actually seems like an 'allegory' of Shanghai" (387), then her death is a deliberate metaphor constructed by the author to indicate the destruction of the real history of Old Shanghai by the city's commercial exploitation of Old Shanghai histories. For Wang Anyi, the realities of Old Shanghai are distorted by contemporary sagas of Old Shanghai. In these narratives, the city's bourgeois ambience in the 1930s becomes championed by a consumer market, while the trials and tribulations experienced by average citizens are overlooked. In addition to this, the death of Wang's protagonist also serves as a symbolic reminder of the fact that the socio-economic transformation in 1990s Shanghai has removed massive *longtang* neighbourhoods. Without them, Shanghai's plebeian culture and the spirit of the city has been lost. However, we also need to be careful about investing too much symbolic significance in the death of Wang Qiyao, and this narrative event may perhaps simply serve the needs of

Wang's plot. If, as Ma Shanglong suggests, Wang Qiyao was based on the story of "Jiang Meiyin" who as the "number one of the top ten beauties in Old Shanghai" was killed by a policeman in 1974 (16), then Wang Qiyao's death is most likely a fictitious plot that attests to this minor historical incident. But it is worth remembering that Wang Anyi is a veteran of fictitious construction and her realistic depiction of Old Shanghai may have many more implications than the reader initially perceives.

Conclusion

In Ellis's *American Psycho*, a resistance to consumer culture in postmodern New York is only perceived through a latent irony forged through mimicking the contemporary culture in great detail. His realistic representation of consumer culture is so lifelike that, at times, it is interpreted as colluding with those very cultural attitudes Ellis intends to criticize. By comparison, Wang Anyi's satire of Old Shanghai nostalgia is based on a realistic construction of Old Shanghai through a detailed account of the city's *longtang* life. At times her fiction is so close to the realities that it is misinterpreted as contributing towards the commodification of Old Shanghai sagas enacted in the successful novels of Wang's contemporaries. Although both Ellis and Wang represent different times and different cities, as well as focusing on different themes, their satirical approaches follow a similar pattern. They both use a realistic literary representation that is constructed through intricate narrative detail. Their satires can only be perceived, therefore, through looking beyond the resemblances between their works and realities. Thus, the formal features of

their texts become an important aspect in analyzing these satires and distinguishing their critique from those realities they seek to represent.

In the Shanghai novels covered in this chapter, nostalgia has become a main theme in the contemporary period. Similarly, we can also identify a faint trace of nostalgia in McInerney's novels, in the form of his representation of the family, tradition and kinship. In *Bright Lights* and *Story of My Life*, this sense of nostalgia is invoked when McInerney uses the images of mothers and fathers. These images often constitute a stark contrast to the emotional vacuum experienced by his protagonists in the course of their indulgent lives in contemporary New York City. However, in *Shanghai Baby*, the sentiment of nostalgia becomes figured more as a cultural construction than individual encounter. The author's references to Old Shanghai reaffirm Coco's complicity with a cultural fascination with Old Shanghai stories. Such a nostalgic sentiment particularly reflects the socio-economic situation of 1990s Shanghai. The prevalent disorientation felt by younger generations, which can clearly be detected in Wei Hui's characters, thus serves to validate Old Shanghai nostalgia as a collective means of imagining the city's future.

Linda Hutcheon has written that "it was postmodernism that brought the conjunction of irony and nostalgia quite literally into the public eye" ("Irony"). By looking at these two notions more carefully, Hutcheon concludes that they both share "a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics", both "less a description of the ENTITY ITSELF than an attribution of a quality of RESPONSE" ("Irony" emphasis in original). The simultaneous resonance and resistance to Old Shanghai nostalgia in Shanghai writing affirms Hutcheon's observations. The postmodern

condition, in Shanghai's case understood as the post-socialist condition, underpins the cultural context for the success of Old Shanghai nostalgia, which becomes a selling point for Wei Hui and offers an effective subject of satire for Wang Anyi.

This engagement with the city renders Wang and Wei more closely connected to New York writers like Ellis and McInerney than has previously been explored in critical literature. The representations of New York and Shanghai established by these writers inform us of the specific time and place of their stories. They also reveal different rhythms of social change through the formal inflexions that distinguish their works from their contemporaries. In the novels of Wei and Wang, descriptions of Shanghai serve not merely to establish setting. They also intersect with these writers' constructions of fictional plots, forming an indispensable part of each story while nourishing the main characters. Wei's ambition-laden city, with its climbing skylines and Western-style *cafés* and bars, matches her Westernized narrative voice, as expressed by characters who worship Western culture and the lifestyles it affords. Wang's depiction of *longtang*, on the other hand, shows a balance of the equal influences of Chinese tradition and Western influence on Shanghai. Like the *longtang* she has portrayed, her protagonist bears the marks of both Chinese and Western influences.

This is different from the way in which New York is approached in the American fiction explored in my previous discussion. In the novels of McInerney and Ellis, the historical context of New York is regarded to a lesser degree than in the fiction of either Wang or Wei. Moreover, a sense of rootedness can be detected when the city's colonial past is briefly mentioned,

indicating perhaps the powerful mechanisms of assimilation that function in New York. Its colonial history has become an integral part of New York's persona and has subsequently entered into the collective subconscious of its citizens and writers.

It must be noted, however, that there is still an obvious difference between the literary forms employed by these Chinese and American writers. Although they unanimously investigate the theme of consumerism, their literary approaches, as well as the relations between their novels as commodities and the contemporary consumer cultures of Shanghai and New York, are significantly different. The most distinctive aspect of the New York writers discussed here are the formal features of their novels. McInerney's second-person narrative and Ellis's highly commodified language reveal the inflexions of consumerism. For the Shanghai writers discussed above, such a relationship is more explicit when one investigates the way in which their novels are commodified and marketed in China's increasingly mature consumer market. At the same time, the linguistic gaps between the English texts and the translations of Chinese texts make it hard for comparison to be made on a more detailed linguistic level. However, an attentive investigation of the way in which these texts are commodified, through similar and different methods, reveals that they indicate the different levels of consumer culture within New York and Shanghai. And the misinterpretations of these novels as cimplicit with the consumer cultures they represent, frequently made by the market and the general public, require us to analyze these writers' central motifs more carefully, as well as to consider the wider implications of their fictional works.

Part II

Chapter Three: Urban Crime in Space and Time—Qiu

Xiaolong's Representation of Shanghai in *When Red Is Black* and *Red Mandarin Dress*

Introduction: Urban Crime in Space and Time

To examine a culture, one need only investigate its crimes. [...] crime fiction takes the temperature of a culture obsessed by paranoia, hooked, as it were, on packageable insights, instant replays, soundbites and various post-mortem proddings (Haut 3).

In his *Neon Noir* (1999), Woody Haut points to the significance of using crime fiction as a way to examine a culture.⁶⁸ In his opinion, this particular genre, with its detection themes and explicit representation of crime, serves as a perceptive means of translating how a culture is organized in a certain society. In recent decades, a considerable number of urban detective novels have emerged where the city space is used as the primary site for crimes. It is believed that the detective genre is instrumental in assisting our comprehension of capitalism and urban problems. Franco Moretti, for instance, has recognized the intricate relationship between the detective genre and capitalist institutions in his 1983 work, *Signs Taken for Wonders*. He observes that: “detective fiction originates at the same time as the trusts, the big banks, and monopolies: mechanisms that make wealth impersonal and separate capital and capitalist” (136). Moretti may not be directly addressing the link between the detective genre and the city, but he certainly perceives a connection between highly

⁶⁸ Although crime fiction is a more encompassing term than detective fiction and the latter is generally believed to be included by crime fiction. In this chapter, I use these terms interchangeably to mean the same thing. All crime novels included in this chapter are also detective novels.

developed capitalist institutions and detective fiction. The city, as the very site in which capitalist transactions are conducted, is therefore key to the genre.

In his study of nineteenth-century Paris, Christopher Prendergast explicitly identifies the connection between the detective genre and the city by stating that detective fiction “is not only a distinctively urban form; it also proposes an increasingly complex and intractable urban reality [that] can be successfully monitored and mastered” (2). Recent studies link the genre with urban space more closely. David Schmid was among the first scholars to reveal the connection of the detective genre to urban geography. He suggests that detective fiction “provide[s] radical geographers with imaginative methodological models of how the various spaces of a city are connected through acts of violence, and how these connections indicate the spatializations of power within the city” (“Imagining Safe Urban Space” 243). Philip Howell builds on this by suggesting that “some forms of crime fiction develop what can be called ‘urban knowledges’ that are as critical and counterhegemonic, if not more so, than much of what passes for radical urban geography” (358). Meanwhile, our understanding of the way in which urban space can impact upon urban living (or in its worst situation, be conducive to crime), is deepened by an increasing amount of social and philosophical criticism on the complicated relationship between space and time. Jon May and Nigel Thrift conceptualize the time/space relationship in an encapsulating term “TimeSpace” (3) and develop this perspective within urban studies. However, a fully persuasive TimeSpace perspective can only be achieved when the subjective stance of the observer is taken into consideration. This important subjective element in perceiving urban space has been best captured by

psychogeographers since the 1950s. Guy Debord, for one, assertively claims that “psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (“Introduction”).

The detective genre’s form and content are both crucial to unpacking the urban labyrinth. Haut has drawn on Charles Baudelaire’s “*flâneur*”, extending Walter Benjamin’s theorization by suggesting that there is a “*flâneur* tradition” within the genre of crime fiction and that the “private investigator” functions as “an analytical observer and connoisseur of city life” who is “searching for cultural clues only to uncover crime and corruption”(179). Detective protagonists in urban fiction may not stroll through city streets as casually as a *flâneur*, but they do stroll for professional purposes. Their mobility from one crime site to another has equipped them with the perspective vital to a *flâneur*. The “*flâneur*” perspective requisite to the detective protagonist provides, therefore, not only a means with which to investigate urban space but serves, crucially, as a “methodological model” to map out power relations within the city. The process of detection, therefore, lends us a sharp lens through which to look at the city through various “cultural clues” in detective fiction. It is with these interpretations in mind that the second part of my dissertation will focus on this specific genre—detective fiction since the 1980s—as a means of comparing representations of Shanghai and New York.

The Detective Genre, Its Writers and the City of Shanghai

This chapter focuses on two of Qiu Xiaolong's Inspector Chen series, *When Red is Black* (2004 *WRIB*) and *Red Mandarin Dress* (2007 *RMD*). My discussion will centre on a series of questions regarding the relationship between crime and the city. Why does Qiu choose the detective genre for his Shanghai stories? How successfully does Qiu's detective framework reveal the history and culture of the city of Shanghai? In what way does Qiu's representation of the city complicate his interpretation of individual crime and its relation to state crime? To what extent do Qiu's perceptions of time and space facilitate his interpretation of class, power relations and recent cultural transitions in Shanghai and China?

My reasons for using these particular novels lie in the fact that Qiu's detailed description of Shanghai, its history and culture, makes the city an indispensable "character" in his Inspector Chen series. Qiu's portrait of Shanghai greatly enriches his socio-political message and the representation of crime. His description of Shanghai's recent history serves as an effective conduit for me to conduct a further investigation of literary depictions of the city, its current transitions and its persona. These qualities mean that Qiu's novels offer a highly relevant comparative body of literature to the Shanghai novels discussed in my previous chapter. However, before discussing Qiu's novels in detail, this chapter will start with a brief investigation of the reception and appropriation of the detective genre as a "foreign" Western genre in Shanghai, and a brief introduction of Qiu and his Inspector Chen series.

Born in 1953, Qiu grew up in the city of Shanghai. When he was 16 years old, he caught bronchitis. This, however, saved him from being mobilized to rural areas like most of his contemporaries during the Cultural Revolution. Feeling bored, he practised *tai chi*, a traditional Chinese shadowboxing, in Shanghai's famous Bund Park. There, he met a retired schoolmaster Mr. Ren who encouraged him to study English and tutored him. It was this rare opportunity of English education that triggered Qiu's lifelong interest in the language. After graduating from the university, he applied for a postgraduate programme in the Chinese Academy of Social Science. He was admitted and became a student of Bian Zhiling, a famous Chinese literary critic and translator. Under Bian's influence, Qiu soon dedicated himself to studying and translating American Impressionist poems. In 1988, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation and decided to go to Washington University, St. Louis for an academic visit. He made this choice because the university was partially founded by the father of his favourite poet, T. S. Eliot, and Qiu hoped to pay tribute to Eliot by studying there and visiting his ancestral home. However, not long after his arrival the Tiananmen Square protests broke out and Qiu decided to move his family to America. In 1996, he attained his doctorate in the same university and continued to teach there.

Written in English, Qiu's first Inspector Chen book, *Death of a Red Heroine* (2000), won him the Anthony Award for Best First Novel in the United States in 2001 and first place in the *Guardian's* list of the "top 10 Asian crime fiction[s]".⁶⁹ The Shanghai-born author has since established himself within this genre in America and Europe by drawing heavily on the recent

⁶⁹ See 2001 Anthony award list at <http://www.readersread.com/awards/anthony.htm>, and "Catherine Sampson's [list of] top 10 Asian crime fiction[s]" at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/aug/27/top10s.asian.crime>.

history of Shanghai. There have been six books in the Inspector Chen series so far: *Death of a Red Heroine* (2000), *A Loyal Character Dancer* (2002), *When Red is Black* (2004), *A Case of Two Cities* (2006), *Red Mandarin Dress* (2007) and *The Mao Case* (2009). His Inspector Chen books are, in Caroline Cummins's words, "unusual in their vivid sense of an author exploring an alien genre, fusing it with Chinese literary traditions and taking it with him to strange new places".

The exotic settings of Shanghai and culturally specific details that Qiu deploys contribute to his success with Western readers and establish Qiu's sense of authority in unraveling mysteries within the city. By embedding the detection within a realistic, detailed and vivid depiction of Shanghai in the 1990s, Qiu has apparently achieved what Patricia Linton called an "entrée into another world" (18).⁷⁰ *A Case of Two Cities* (2006), for example, is regarded as "atmospheric and rich in behind-the-scenes detail" (Hirst, Guest and Tonkin). But Qiu's ambition lies in using his detective framework and its cultural appeal as a medium to interpret the changing city and, in a broader sense, the changing country. For the author, the transition of Shanghai (and of China) entails a constant negotiation with its traumatic memory of the Cultural Revolution. As Tobias Jones comments on Chen, the protagonist in Qiu's novels, that "[r]esolving a whodunit isn't enough for Chen; he has to uncover everything about the Cultural Revolution." Interestingly enough, rather than being classified as a detective novel, *Death of a Red Heroine*, for instance, has been

⁷⁰ Patricia Linton argues that "In the contemporary detective genre, novels often develop an intriguing complexity by drawing on culturally specific detail, lore that the detective already knows or is particularly competent to bring to light. Indeed, the reader's appetite for arcane information—for exotic settings, rare expertise, cultural difference—is part of the appeal of the genre. Some measure of the detective's insight (whether that insight is brought to the case or acquired as a result of it) becomes available to readers. Thus, part of the satisfaction detective fiction provides is the (sense of) entrée into another world." See Linton 18.

named “one of the five best political novels” by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2006 (K. Zhang). In Howard French’s words, *When Red is Black* is “[i]n the guise of a simple detective story [...] a very effective account, albeit fiction, of Shanghai’s recent history”. The author confessed in an interview with Kuai Lehao that:

[My] original intention was not to write detective novels. But amongst the western detective genres, there is a subgenre which emphasizes social problems. Ironically enough, the School of Sociology in the University of California, Los Angeles uses my novels as textbooks (Qiu, interview).

For Qiu, the detective genre is a means to an end. The blurred borderline between different categorizations of his novels by the Western media reveals the seriousness of his social and political themes and triggers further questions as to whether the “alien” detective genre works well to achieve the author’s purpose in depicting social realities. One repeated theme of these two novels (and indeed of the entire Chen series) is the Cultural Revolution. Although Qiu’s depiction of Shanghai mainly reveals the transitions of the city between the 1980s and the 1990s, the plots, characters and themes of the novels all work closely to accentuate the impact of the Cultural Revolution, which, according to him in one interview, “definitely is part of the present” (Qiu, interview by Koh).

Historically, the detective genre has a precarious and delicate relationship with Shanghai’s semi-colonial past. Following other scientific works such as Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), detective novels like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series were among the first texts to be introduced to China in the early twentieth century as a means to enlighten the Chinese about Western democracy, science and technology.

Echoing the impulses of the May Fourth Movement⁷¹ in 1919, the detective genre is regarded as epitomizing “a modern ideology that is closely associated with modern cities. It relates to China’s modernization process” (Yuan). Cheng Xiaoqing, a Shanghai writer in the 1940s, was the most acclaimed in appropriating and popularizing this Western genre in China. His detective protagonist Huo Sang was literally the first private detective character in Chinese literary history. However, due to the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945),⁷² the Civil War (1946-1949), and the destruction of the Cultural Revolution since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, the detective genre, as well as the publishing industry as a whole, has stalled. During the Cultural Revolution, literature containing Western bourgeois ideology was forbidden, and detective fiction suffered as a direct result of this policy. When the publishing industry began to revitalise itself in the 1980s few Chinese, and even fewer Shanghai writers, were left working within this genre.

Despite this cultural obstruction to the development of detective fiction in China, there have been always a few writers who retained their interest in the genre. Among the few, Cao Zhengwen is perhaps one of the most acknowledged Shanghai writers before Qiu to experiment with the detective genre after the Cultural Revolution. Working as a journalist for the influential

⁷¹ The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist cultural and political movement growing out of student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919. The students protested against the weak response of the Chinese government (under the control of Beiyang Warlords) to the Treaty of Versailles, especially regarding the Shandong Problem. The movement articulated the contempt for traditional Chinese culture felt by many Chinese intellectuals. These intellectuals blamed traditional culture for China’s dramatic and rapid decline into a subordinate international position, and maintained that China’s cultural values prevented the country from matching the industrial and military developments in Japan and the West. The broader use of the term “May Fourth Movement” often refers to the period between 1915 and 1921. It is alternatively called the New Culture Movement. See: Chow 1-11 and Fu.

⁷² The Anti-Japanese War was a military conflict between China and the Empire of Japan. As part of the Second World War, it started in 1937 although the two countries had fought intermittently since 1931. The war was the result of a decade-long Japanese imperialist policy aiming to dominate China politically and militarily and to secure its vast raw material reserves and other natural resources. It ended only with the surrender of Japan in 1945.

local newspaper, *Xin Min Evening News*, Cao is a prolific writer who has published some forty works. With an interest in traditional Chinese Wu Xia fiction,⁷³ he published a series of Wu Xia novels in his early years. Since the 1980s, Cao has shifted his attention to the detective genre and published a series of works including *Shadow of Qiu Xiang Villa* (1985), *Amorous Thief* (1986), *Dilemma of Men in Their Forties* (1988), *Maze at Buddha Island* (1988), *Golden Trap* (1989), *Purple Seduction* (1990) and his latest work, *Red House Labyrinth* (2003).

Unlike Qiu Xiaolong's use of the genre, Cao's detective stories are influenced by both the Chinese Wu Xia tradition and the Western detective heritage. In communist China, his detective fiction is labelled as *Gong'an*, or Policeman Literature, as no private detectives are deemed necessary for the socialist regime. In this political atmosphere, even crime is something that should not exist in an egalitarian country. For this reason, all detective fiction in new China is published under strict self-censorship by authors and publishers. No real names of places or people appear in any detective novel. They are purely fictional. Cao's detective series, for example, is concerned with Shanghai but he never uses any real names in his novels.⁷⁴ Cao has claimed that "this is a unique phenomenon in China because of an inherited ideological control. As a matter of fact, the crime rate of Shanghai since the 1980s has been rising all the time and it has reached a staggering number" (Z.

⁷³ Wu Xia fiction is a unique Chinese literary genre that draws heavily on the *kungfu* tradition. The main characters in Wu Xia novels are Chinese swordsmen and knights who practise *kungfu* and defend social justice by using their *kungfu* skills. The theme of the stories emphasizes the punishment of social evils and the establishment of social justice. The stories usually deploy historical settings and some of the characters are imaginary incarnations of historical figures. The genre started during the period of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618—907) and developed into a popular literary form during the era of the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1616—1912).

⁷⁴ In my telephone interview with Cao Zhengwen on 30 July 2009, he stated explicitly that all his novels are based on real crimes happening in Shanghai as reworked through his imagination and artistic exaggeration. See Z. Cao.

Cao). Cao alludes to his reasons for writing in this particular genre when describing the time he spent working as a reporter at the *Xin Min Evening News*. Well versed in the various social ills in Shanghai, he states that he chose to use detective fiction as a means to “report” social problems to his readers (Z. Cao).

The same censorial scrutiny has been utilised in Qiu Xiaolong’s Chinese translations of his Chen series in the twenty-first century. In his Chinese translations, Shanghai is replaced by “H city” and “all the street names have consequently changed too” (Qiu, interview by Black), to enable the author to be published in China. Some of his direct, politically explicit references to the country’s leaders and the Communist Party have been removed. In an e-mail to the author, I asked him whether it was fair to say that the changes made to the Chinese versions of his novels were confined to street names and some political references. The author replied by saying that “it’s a bit more than that if you compare the ending of the English and Chinese [version of] *Death of a Red Heroine*” (Cai).

In a sense, Qiu Xiaolong is literally the first Shanghai writer to have adapted this popular Western genre to stories of Shanghai in the contemporary period. This suggests not only his personal aspiration to rectify certain historical wrongs imposed on his parents’ and his own generation through resorting to a genre that relies heavily on a well-defined legal system (such as the Cultural Revolution, which features heavily in all his stories) but also, in a larger sense, his insistent use of the detective genre suggests a continuous effort towards the ideological transformation necessary for China’s modernization process.⁷⁵ The genre therefore provides the author with a

⁷⁵ In “Detective Fiction and New Ideologies”, Yuan Jin observes that the surge of translations of detective fiction from the West in the early 1900s in China is closely linked to the call for

framework for achieving symbolic justice and for allowing scientific and democratic ideologies to permeate Chinese culture. On the other hand, by relating the history of the Cultural Revolution to Shanghai's recent social and economic transition, the author evokes a memory that is soon to be forgotten by younger generations who are completely absorbed in the economic development of Shanghai and of China. The genre offers, therefore, a means through which history can be remembered and people who were afflicted by that history are able to grieve over personal and national traumas. Qiu's own decision to employ this history elaborately in his novels evidences an emotional grieving process, as well as a necessary re-investigation of that history which is worthy of further contemplation, not only by individual Chinese citizens but also by the Chinese government.

What increases the tension within these texts is that Qiu's representation of Shanghai is based on his memory, instead of his direct experience of Shanghai. Having moved to the U.S. in 1988, Qiu has remained in St. Louis, Missouri ever since. This transformation of location has given Qiu what he calls "a needed distance" (Black). He believes that living in America has provided him "with a different perspective, as if I were both an insider and an outsider simultaneously [...] with a value system too" (Qiu, interview by Black). Such a dual identity has complicated Qiu's representation of Shanghai,

enlightenment by Chinese intellectuals. He argues that detective fiction was introduced to China as part of a process of "enlightenment reading" through which "the reader and the translator have related [the genre] to Western ideology, science, legal society and the import of [Western] civilization". For Yuan, the introduction of detective fiction into China signifies the beginning of China's modernization process. But he emphasizes the underdevelopment of detective fiction in China since this period, in comparison with its development in Western countries and Japan, calling for further investigation into the reasons underpinning the insufficient appropriation of the genre by the Chinese. It can be inferred from his argument that the development of detective fiction in Asian countries can function as an index to reveal a country's level of modernization. See Yuan.

filling it with certain expectations and anticipations that perhaps cannot be fulfilled within the current social system of China.

Although Qiu has gained international fame for his Inspector Chen books as well as a growing international readership, his books have not aroused adequate scholarly attention either at home or abroad. In China, most of his Chen books have been published in translated versions, but Qiu remains an extremely under-researched author with a small readership. This has a lot to do with the marketing of his novels but is also the result of the author's transnational identity, which makes him less influential than native writers in both the Chinese and English-speaking markets.

The focus of my discussion will centre on Qiu's representation of urban characters and spaces (crime sites) in 1980s and 1990s Shanghai. I will investigate whether his representation of Shanghai facilitates Qiu's crime themes and contributes to the larger purpose of his novels. My hypothesis is that the detective genre allows a richer cluster of characters to be introduced in Qiu's novels. This in turn allows him to demonstrate a fuller picture of various social groups in contemporary Shanghai. I also contend that the author uses urban spaces with an acute temporal awareness, which helps deepen the exploration and investigation of the city's history and culture, revealing the state crime that lies behind the individual crime. By comparing Qiu's texts with the Shanghai writers discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to reveal the representation of a continuously changing Shanghai, and contemplate the problematic aspects of Qiu's representation caused by the tensions between genre and theme, memory and reality, and the author's own identity as both an insider and outsider within Chinese culture.

Detectives and Criminals: Urban Characters in Transition

The intricate focus on crime in the detective genre demands a legible cluster of characters to allow a certain complexity within the story so that in following the plot the reader can try to match their wits with those of the author. Although recent trends suggest that the detective genre can be both plot-driven and character-driven, the convention of the genre stipulates that character development must cater to a realistic development of the plot. In Qiu's novels, the detective protagonists Chen and Yu, together with other characters, evolve and develop in successive stories; and their character development is more associated with, and confined by, the evolution of the plot. I am not claiming, though, that characterization is subordinate to plot-development in a detective story. Far from it, good characterization in a detective novel is vital and key to promoting the detection, as well as central to retaining the reader's curiosity and attention.

In Qiu's Inspector Chen series, the characters are carefully crafted. Each has his own representational function in promoting the detective plot while accommodating certain realistic socio-political themes. In the following analysis of the representations of his main characters in *When Red is Black* and *Red Mandarin Dress*, the inter-relationships connecting these characters and the cultural metaphors they provide, I contend that the characterization in Qiu's novels plays an important part in deepening his socio-political themes.

Chen Cao, the Intellectual Detective: Personality and Partnership

In *When Red is Black*, Detective Yu of the Shanghai Police Bureau is forced to lead a murder case assigned to him by Party Secretary Li Shikun while his team leader and sidekick, Chief Inspector Chen Cao, is taking his vacation. A former Red Guard ⁷⁶ in the Cultural Revolution, novelist Yin Lige has been murdered at home. Her death is linked to a talented university professor named Yang Bing who was victimized during the Cultural Revolution, and who has left some politically controversial manuscripts containing novels and poems. At first, it appears that the murderer is one of Yin's neighbours. Old Liang, the policeman in the Neighbourhood Committee, produces a list of suspects, mostly comprising Yin's neighbours. The suspects and their assumed motives for committing the crime offer a picture of various social strata that indicate the demise of an egalitarian society. Instead, a new urban landscape begins to emerge, torn by conflicting social ideologies and widening gaps between rich and poor. But when Wan, one of Yin's neighbours, confesses, Detective Yu has evidence enough to establish his innocence. As Yu looks into the case further, more evidence begins to surface, leading him and Chen to the real culprit: Yang's great-nephew Bao Guohua, who wants to retrieve Yang's manuscripts from Yin in order to make a profit out of them. However, it is only when Inspector Chen returns to the investigation that Bao's crime is established and he is apprehended by the law.

⁷⁶ The Red Guards, or *hong weibing*, were Mao Zedong's ardent followers during the Cultural Revolution. They were formed by civilians, mostly students and young people. They were the major force who castigated intellectuals *en masse* and deemed the bourgeois class to be "counter-revolutionaries" during the country's ten-year long mass political movement.

The representation of various suspects demonstrates Qiu's ability to deploy characters to illustrate the socio-political themes that concern him. But it is the vivid depiction of his two detective characters that further exhibits his skill in employing characters to promote his socio-political message. From the outset, the partnership between Inspector Chen and Detective Yu forms a seemingly stereotypical Sherlock Holmes-Doctor Watson pattern. Chen, in the guise of a vacationer on leave, is investigating the case from a concealed position, with information gathered from Yu as well as through his personal channels. Yet he is the real mastermind behind the whole investigation. This makes him a Holmes-like genius and mysterious figure. Resembling Watson, Detective Yu pursues the case openly, acting as the main pursuer of all the leads. He is portrayed as a loyal follower and tacit sidekick of Chen, much in the same mould as Watson to Holmes.

The concealed versus open positions enacted by Chen and Yu allow a multi-faceted perspective on the case. At times, their approaches to the case and their different understandings of the city are complementary to the extent that the resolution of the mystery depends on their combined efforts. Yu's careful investigation of the suspects on Old Liang's list rules out the possibility that the murderer is one of Yin's neighbours while it is Inspector Chen who figures out the motive for the murder that eventually guides them to the real culprit. In contrast to the case of Holmes and Watson, however, their partnership is configured by their identities as policemen in 1990s Shanghai, resulting in certain compromises which they both have to make. Although they are conscientious defenders of the law, both of their detective investigations are

frequently interfered with, and occasionally damaged, by their politically over-sensitive superiors.

Inspector Chen is an intellectual-turned-policeman with concerns about many social issues. Writing poems and doing part-time translation work to earn an extra income in an increasingly materialistic Shanghai, Chen represents the image of a well-educated professional whose social and political ideals are compromised by the professional demands made upon him, as well as by his growing materialistic desires. But he has acquired certain political sensibilities and interpersonal skills that allow him to gain a degree of fluidity within the system. Meanwhile, as a team leader, he exhibits the potential to be promoted.

Chen's concealed position during the investigation is further complicated by a few suggested connections between higher officials in the Ministry of Public Security from Beijing, himself, the local government, and local gangs. At one point, he receives a direct phone call from the Minister of Public Security, Huang, who praises him as part of "an emerging cadre of the new Chinese police force" (*WRIB* 42). This is quickly picked up by his superior, Party Secretary Li, who feels that "the too-swift rise of Chen—at [his] expense—[is] unacceptable" (*WRIB* 42). At another time, Chen successfully assists Detective Yu in securing an apartment by talking to "the city housing office" (*WRIB* 308).

Later in the novel, the reader is informed that taking a holiday is partly Chen's excuse to avoid direct conflict with Li. But the vacation is also used by him to translate a business proposal for a commercial complex in Shanghai called New World. This is offered by a well-connected businessman Gu, who is involved with local gangs and organized criminals. He predicts that Chen

will easily be granted his two weeks' leave from his superior Li: "He won't refuse you, I know. You are a rising star, with a most promising future" (*WRIB* 16). Whether the predictive tone and compliments are mere courtesies, or are based on Gu's research into Chen's prospects in the Police Bureau is unclear. But it is more than evident that Chen is so well-connected that although he knows Gu's offer will involve some inevitable trade-off, he accepts it, is vastly overpaid, and eventually assists Gu to secure the car park for the New World by making "a couple of phone calls" (*WRIB* 282) to his former colleagues in the "city traffic control office" (*WRIB* 280). For Chen, such a favour falls into the Confucian category of "*things a man can do*" (*WRIB* 283 emphasis in original), as an innocuous personal favour in return for Gu's timely help with tracking down the culprit's hideout.

Chen is walking a thin line between his responsibilities and the insidious traps of corruption. He reminds himself constantly of the Confucian dictum that: "*There are things a man can do, and things a man cannot do*" (*WRIB* 283 emphasis in original). However, he understands clearly that he is trapped in a tightly-knit social web from which he enjoys little freedom to make choices of his own. Compromises are the only way to strike a balance between work and conscience. As the narrator explains in the novel:

A new sort of social relationship, cobweb-like, seemed to have developed, connecting people closely together along the threads of their interests. The existence of each thread depended on the others. Like it or not, Chief Inspector Chen was bound up in this network of connections (*WRIB* 283).

What is described here is a stubborn cultural heritage that permeates China's social systems. An important aspect of traditional Chinese culture *Guanxi*,⁷⁷ or

⁷⁷ *Guanxi* is a term to describe the networking between people, usually conducted in business dealings, in China. It is frequently associated with commercial corruption in Chinese society. It

interpersonal relationships and social connections, continues to play a prominent role in 1990s Shanghai, making people susceptible to corrupt dealings which contravene the law. As the author has stressed more than once in interviews, his protagonist Chen is a character situated somewhere “between a hero and an anti-hero” (K. Wei), so it is perhaps no surprise that Chen has to make compromises from within the system in order to achieve professional goals. His compromises derive from his intention to resolve criminal cases with a clean conscience. The author explains in another interview that:

Chen is a survivor in the given social structure. I would have liked him to do more, but as a man who continues to thrive in the system, Chen knows what to do and not to do. At the same time, he is also a man informed by [the] conflicting values and ideologies of his time, more or less symbolic of the society in a transitional period (Qiu, interview by Black).

Although the author never believes that Chen can be “as ingenious as Holmes” (K. Wei), he demonstrates Chen’s superior capacity in resolving the case by revealing his “cobweb” of social connections. Having access to the Minister for Public Security as well as a businessman with friends in an underground Chinese gang, Chen demonstrates the importance of social connections to his profession in 1990s Shanghai.

But the complexity of the protagonist does not stop here. An amateur gourmand with a passion for poetry, he has a penchant for the modern Western lifestyle as, quite unusually, a coffee-drinker in early 1990s Shanghai.⁷⁸ At the same time, he has received enough English language education to become a competent part-time translator. What is depicted here is a policeman-

is often argued that China is more of a *guanxi* society: a society where interpersonal relationships play a paramount role in the distribution of social resources rather than one that is regulated by the law.

⁷⁸ Coffee is not a traditional drink in China. Although it was introduced to the country relatively early, coffee has only become popular in recent decades as an imported “Western” drink within people’s daily life. The first Nestlé coffee TV commercial was broadcast on Chinese television in the early 1990s.

investigator who lives a bourgeois lifestyle in 1990s Shanghai. It would be inaccurate to regard Chen as a modern-day *flâneur* given the theoretical complication of the use of the concept in various academic disciplines, not to mention that Chen's inheritance of feudalistic traditions distinguishes him distinctly from a Western *flâneur*. But the bourgeois class identity Chen's lifestyle represents, together with his dispassionate observations of the city's history, architecture and changing landscapes, partially qualifies his activities as *flânerie*.⁷⁹ What is interesting is that the character of Inspector Chen emerges at a unique time in Shanghai's economic transition, during which capitalism was replacing socialism. This more or less refers the symbolic significance of Chen back to the representational function of the *flâneur*. There is a certain defining quality within the character of Chen that links 1990s Shanghai to the *flâneur* of 1840s Paris. Both offer a perspective on urbanisation and modernisation. In addition, David Frisby's observation that the *flâneur* is a sociologist who not only observes but is also "a producer of literary texts [...] illustrative texts [...] narratives and reports, [...] journalistic texts, [...] sociological texts" (Frisby, "The *Flâneur*" 82-83) is echoed by Inspector Chen's avocation of being a poet and social observer who produces poems and records his thoughts on social realities.

As such, in his persona Chen epitomizes a series of contradictions. He is influenced by both Western and Eastern cultures. His pursuit of material freedom reminds us more of the modern Western bourgeoisie. And his ability to think independently often distinguishes him from the stereotypical policeman. However, he also compromises his principles to facilitate his

⁷⁹ In *The Flâneur* (1994), "*flânerie*" is described as "the activity of strolling and looking which is carried out by the *flâneur*" and "a recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of urban, and most especially of the metropolitan, existence". See Tester, 1.

investigations. Such compromises, though tacitly, often endanger his neutral stand and place him in a precarious position between integrity and corruption.

Detective Yu, on the other hand, represents a much more traditional personality compared with Chen. Being a caring husband, Yu has more practical concerns: to improve the living standard of his family in an increasingly materialistic city. Yu is conscientious in his job, trying to believe that it is honourable and worthwhile to work as a policeman with a meagre income in a swiftly changing Shanghai. Unlike Chen, Yu is a single-minded, upright and honest policeman who has not acquired Chen's facility for playing the system. His failed communication concerning the case with Party Secretary Li, as well as his repeated frustrations at achieving the assigned apartment from the Police Bureau, shows us the limitations facing an earnest, under-connected detective like Yu within a system that is beset by hierarchical interpersonal relations. Without connections, Yu seems very unlikely to penetrate this web of power.

Yet Yu provides a vital comparative perspective with Chen. While Chen is successful and "promising", the offhand treatment Yu receives suggests less his incompetence at work (since he is as capable and experienced as Chen in the investigation) but signals, rather, a privileged and unequal social structure that simply favours people who have more "connections". Yu also serves as an antithesis, revealing the compromises Chen has made and the complexity contained within Chen's character. As Yu observes when they surprise the criminal Bao Guohua by suddenly searching his residence:

This is not like Chen, who normally made a point of following procedure. But they were pressed for time, Yu knew. [...] Again, Chen was departing from his usual standard of behaviour this

morning, Yu observed. They did not even have a search warrant (*WRIB* 267).

Without a search warrant, Inspector Chen asks Yu to interrogate Bao while he searches his room, obtaining the manuscript as expected. Employing a modest threat in addition to the evidence they have acquired, Chen and Yu quiz Bao in his room and get all the details they are looking for. Chen's capacity to work under duress, albeit cautiously, is perhaps what makes him a survivor within the system. This side of Chen is also reminiscent of the Western tradition of the 'maverick cop', in the sense that the policeman has to break the rules in order to find answers. Such a depiction once more reveals Chen's Westernized personality.

Chen's ability to mediate between different interests is something that Yu can never possess. But Chen, who is apparently more highly-educated than most of his colleagues in the Police Bureau and who is significantly influenced by Western culture, does not exhibit those modern aspirations that the reader might anticipate, given his modern lifestyle and behaviour at work. Benefiting from the social connections that continue to function as a vital inheritance from feudalistic Chinese society, he demonstrates certain reservations that hold him back from being an entirely modern detective. In particular, the trade-off between himself and Gu in both novels indicates Chen's recurring tendency to take advantage of the social network offered by his job. This only confirms Chen's complicity with a flawed social system. Although his behaviour by no means breaches the law, it puts him in a precarious position that blurs the distinction between corruption and "favours" he offers his friends. Through such a representation, China's legislation is revealed to be flawed and problematic. The readers are therefore compelled to question Chen's seemingly

neutral and objective standpoint. Ironically, his reserve, as well as the compromises he makes which are incompatible with his image as a modern intellectual, serve as a metaphor for the city in its own right. While Shanghai is evidently moving forward in economic terms according to Qiu's depiction, the compromises it has made suggest otherwise. What is at stake here is a stubborn cultural heritage that permeates Shanghai's contemporary social systems.

Chen's cultural performance in the urban environment can be further understood through the concealed versus open partnership he shares with Yu. While Yu typifies a spirit of fair play and integrity, to the point of simple-mindedness, his progress with the investigation is constantly disrupted by his superior, Li. The support he receives from Chen is essential. To mediate the pressure he receives from Li, Chen has to ask his friend Gu, who is connected with local gangs, to help find the culprit Bao within the deadline imposed by Li. By doing so, Chen sidesteps a direct conflict with Li. This is ironic in the sense that policemen like Chen needs to seek help from the underground, criminal gangs. And the Chinese justice system, especially as represented in the person of Li, instead of facilitating the legislation, imposes barriers upon the apprehension of true criminals.

In *Red Mandarin Dress*, the concealed versus open partnership between Inspector Chen and Detective Yu continues. The story starts with a serial murder case in Shanghai. The first three victims, two of whom are indirectly connected with the sex industry in the city, are found dead in the city centre, both barely concealed by red mandarin dresses. The last victim, Chen's colleague, is abducted during her undercover mission in the famous Joy Gate dancing club and is later discovered at Lian Yi Cemetery in the city's suburbs,

killed in the same way. This causes great panic among local people. Inspector Chen, who excuses himself from a complicated real estate case involving governmental officials, is absent from the investigation again, this time on a special MA course on ancient Chinese literature. His half-hearted concern for the serial murder case does not generate any clues. However, his research on his MA programme seems to shed light on the culprit's psychological motivation. It is not until his colleague is killed that Chen begins to involve himself wholeheartedly in the case. With the help of Detective Yu he pieces together the leads that finally help trace the culprit.

As the evidence shows, the serial killer has a strong penchant for the red mandarin dress; a particular style which was popular in the 1960s. Pursuing this clue, Chen discovers a connection between the red mandarin dress and a lady whose image in a similar dress was printed on the cover of a popular 1960s magazine. Inspector Chen's intuition and careful observation lead him to believe that the killer suffers from an Oedipus complex. Meanwhile, the manager of the Joy Gate club where the latest victim has been abducted reveals a name on the club's guest list which courts the attention from the police. To Chen's surprise, it turns out to be Jia Ming, a promising and upright lawyer whom he encountered in the former real estate lawsuit against the local government. Further investigations of Jia Ming's personal history and family background disclose the twists and turns his family has endured during the Cultural Revolution, as well as his personal struggle to survive this family trauma. The story ends with Jia's sudden death in court (implied to be a suicide) before it is discovered that he has donated all his savings to those residents who suffered financial losses in the lawsuit.

The depiction of a changing urban landscape in the storyline of *Red Mandarin Dress* is situated within the reality of twenty-first-century Shanghai. Shanghai's property market started to grow from 1998, when the People's Bank of China issued new rules on residential mortgage lending. But it was not until the early years of the twenty-first century that the property market began to soar. This rapidly expanding property market has not only nurtured Shanghai's *nouveaux riches* but has also fostered rampant real estate crime. The case of the Shanghai property tycoon Zhou Zhengyi, allegedly China's 11th richest person according to the 2002 Forbes China Rich List, was implicated in a case dealing with the misuse of social security funding, which brought down the former Mayor of Shanghai, Chen Liangyu. Zhou was arrested in 2003 for fraud and stock market manipulation and arrested again for suspected bribery and forgery of VAT receipts in 2006 (L. Cao 4). Around the same time in 2003, a local lawyer Zheng Enchong, who had represented numerous housing residents bringing lawsuits against property redevelopers, was arrested and sentenced to three years in jail (P. Chen). The similarities between Qiu's story and these particular social realities reveal that Qiu's depiction of Shanghai is well grounded in contemporary social realities. Although he lives in the United States, Qiu manages to capture the changes taking place in twenty-first-century Shanghai through his research. This makes his stories highly relevant as a means to interpret the city in the contemporary period.

In contrast to his experience in *When Red is Black*, Inspector Chen has had a thorough break from the investigation in *Red Mandarin Dress*. After a period of overworking, he decides to take time off for a holiday. Totally absent

from the serial murder case, at a vacation village outside of the city, Chen's temporary abandonment of the case offers a chance for the reader to penetrate into the character's inner self. His time in the village is enriched by its General Manager Pei's offer of an invigorating *Bu* feast (arranged by his businessman friend Gu) and a brief encounter with a young Chinese lady called Susan who "teaches women's studies at Shanghai Teachers College" (RMD 155).⁸⁰ Their discussion about female images in Chinese classics follows the love and romance theme which Chen pursues for his MA programme. But also, it enables Chen to probe into the criminal's psyche later in his investigation. The understanding of culture, therefore, plays a highly relevant and significant role in resolving the case. Meanwhile, the Confucian classics that Chen has been reading point to a demonized image of femininity, as perceived by men in Chinese culture. This alludes to Qiu's problem in engaging in a serious relationship with a woman but also foreshadows the psychological motivation of the culprit. This exploration of female images, as revealed through Chen's reading and his discussion with Susan, allows the reader to contemplate his sexuality and his overly-repressed selfhood. At one point, Chen becomes such a stranger that the reader can hardly recognize him:

He was seized by an overwhelming impulse to do irrational things—to kick the wall, to howl like an owl, to smash, to shout the politically blasphemous. Sweating, stuffing a fist into his mouth like battling a toothache, he hurried to lock the door before swallowing a couple of sleeping pills and slumping across the bed (RMD 129).

Alluded to by the narrator as a "nervous breakdown" (RMD 129-30), Chen's temporary spell of mental instability discloses a degree of repression that is

⁸⁰ Bu feast, according to Qiu, "defies translation. It could mean, among other things, a special herb and food nutritional boost to the body, a concept embedded in Chinese medical theories, particularly in terms of the yin/yang system." See Qiu, RMD 132-33.

barely evident in *When Red is Black*. By contrast, Chen appears in *When Red is Black* as a consistently poised, controlled man at work who shows great discipline and flexibility in dealing with his superiors and his friend with criminal, gang connections. As a discreet inspector who adheres cautiously to the political guidelines of his government, Chen's temporary loss of control in "shout[ing] the politically blasphemous" not only offers an indication of his sexually repressed self, but also reveals the repressed political atmosphere around him. Yet instead of releasing his repressive emotions completely, Chen chooses to control and discipline himself by "stuffing a fist in his mouth like battling a toothache" and "swallowing a couple of sleeping pills and slumping across the bed". These seemingly rational behaviours only serve to emphasise the effort Chen has to exert in order to calm himself down. They are also a clear demonstration of the level of self-control Chen has enforced upon himself in order to behave appropriately within his professional role.

The description of Chen's mental state is further supplemented by a self-exploratory account of a sexual dream:

The red mandarin dress case was still on his mind, but the appearance of White Cloud in the dream bothered him, not to mention his own behavior. Perhaps it was because of his experience in the Old City God's Temple Market. Or perhaps it was the *bu* feast—such an unusual boost to yin and yang that he was aroused. Still, it might be a good sign. He had recovered enough to dream like a young man (*RMD* 148-49).

Such a revelation of Chen's subconscious mind further enriches the character, making him a believable character with his own troubles and vulnerabilities. Importantly, it serves as a unifying strand to bring together the author's socio-political themes with his characters and his depiction of crime. Chen's research into love and romance, his discussion of images of femininity in Chinese

literary classics with Susan, and his self-analysis of his own sexuality, appear to be hardly relevant to the investigation at first. But as the plot continues, they prove to be closely linked to the psychoanalytical approach Chen applies to his investigation of the case, which gradually draws him closer to the real criminal. More importantly, such a self-analytical approach serves as an implicit metaphor to suggest the different ways in which the country's recent history can be re-examined, namely, by looking beyond superficial social crimes to reveal the latent ideological conflicts that continue to affect the people and the state. By dwelling on the ramifications of Chen's private life the author has achieved several aims here, affording his reader an immediate access both to the narrative's crime as well as to the history of the Cultural Revolution.

By offering a comparative reading of Qiu's *When Red is Black* and *Red Mandarin Dress*, a fuller picture of Chen's character has emerged, revealing conflicts within the character. Qiu reveals the complexity of Chen's professional and intellectual life with the revelation of his dilemma and vulnerabilities. The fact that Chen is a modern intellectual inspector, who shows great concerns for many social issues such as the growing gap between rich and poor, provides a vital perspective for the reader's observation of Shanghai. The partnership between Detective Yu and Chen enables a multi-faceted observation of the city. Through Chen's intellectual perspective, Qiu is able to deploy the cultural and historical clues that assist the narrative investigation of the crime as well as serving the author's socio-political themes. Chen's identity is therefore employed by Qiu as a metaphor through which to analyze corruption and crime in contemporary Shanghai and, by extension, the

history of the Cultural Revolution which still exerts a lingering impact on the city and the country today.

Victimized Criminals

The detective characters in Qiu's two novels provide vital perspectives for observing the city of Shanghai. However, it is the characterization of the victims that further develops those themes and plots pertinent to interrogating not only individual crimes, but also state crimes (such as the Cultural Revolution). In *When Red is Black*, the criminal Bao Guohua, Yang's grandnephew, is associated with the Cultural Revolution in several important ways. Bao's mother, who was implicated by her counter-revolutionary uncle Yang, was forced to leave Shanghai for Jiangxi province (*WRIB* 269)—a poor rural region—for re-education. Later she gets married there and gives birth to Bao. Bao's birth in a poor rural area, instead of in Shanghai, changes his fate completely since China's Household Registration Policy⁸¹ hinders the mobility of its citizens from rural to urban regions. Regional disparities thus pose a huge challenge for equal opportunities and this disparity is all the more alarming with the growth of Shanghai's economy and the emergence of more

⁸¹ China's household registration (*hukou*) system refers to the system of residency permits required by law as a way for the government to restrict rural-urban migration in the People's Republic of China. A household booklet (*hukou bu*) identifies a person as a resident of a certain area (often where he is born) and includes identifying information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth. This, to some extent, limits an individual's mobility as his education, social welfare and other legal rights are often confined by his regional identity, as stipulated on the *hukou*. Since the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978, economic privatization and government reforms have weakened *hukou* limits on internal migration. Up to 150 million rural residents have since migrated to Chinese cities for work in one of the largest migrations in human history. And *hukou* reform has become one of the most debated issues in government policy making in China in the past few years. See Mallee.

opportunities for its citizens. Bao does not realize how different life can be for a Shanghai citizen until after his trip to Shanghai:

He went back to his village with less than a thousand Yuan. It was not a small sum to the villagers, but Bao was no longer the same young man, content to work there like his father and forefather, toiling in the rice paddy, his legs covered in mud. The trip to Shanghai had opened his eyes to a new world. The fact that his grandmother had lived in the city all her life, and his mother for seventeen years, and more than anything else, the legend of his granduncle, made it impossible for Bao to stay on in the poor backward village (*WRIB* 271).

The impact of a fast-changing Shanghai on Bao is so huge that he is transformed into a different person. Such a description vividly articulates the tremendous impact of China's urbanization on rural individuals and rural culture in recent decades. For Bao, such an impact is complicated by the denial of his Shanghai citizenship as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution. His attempt to re-engage with his late grand-uncle, in economic terms, can not only be seen as a way to reclaim his Shanghai citizenship, but also demonstrates the current social cause of his crime—the widening gap between the rural and the urban as a direct result of the Reform and Opening-up Policy. In Bao's case, the impact of the Cultural Revolution has passed down from generation to generation and manifests its consequences on him in the form of crime. Bao is, in this light, an indirect victim of this history. However, through using Shanghai's recent economic development to foreground the story, Qiu seems to suggest that the current socio-economic reform has intensified the historical wrongs passed down from the Cultural Revolution.

Here, Qiu's obvious desire to make a political point about the far-reaching impact of the Cultural Revolution partially problematises his construction of the character of Bao. As a rural farmer, Bao may have been

better used as a metaphor to show the unprecedented impact of urbanization on China's vast rural population and dominant rural culture. For the author, his eagerness to use the return of capitalism to the city as a way to call for a reinvestigation into the historical wrongs overwhelms his investigation into the current problem of the city's rapid economic transformation. Bao may well be used to address the problematic aspect of China's drastic urbanization in the sense that the rapid urbanization demands a new consciousness and identity that cannot be found among the country's dominant rural culture, and therefore intensifies the tension between the rural and the urban. In other words, the civic consciousness requisite to further the city's urbanization (and the country's modernization) is apparently lagging behind its economic development. In her *Cities Surround The Countryside* (2010), Robin Visser points out how urbanization has transformed China: "the capitalist city—denounced as parasitical under Mao and devalued by the norms of traditional Chinese ethics—now functions in China as a site of individual and collective identity" (2). Such a collective identity has not yet forged in present-day China because the gap between China's rural and urban regions makes the country ever so jagged and uneven. The tension between the urban and the rural that is increasingly evident in Shanghai life, not only in economic terms, but also in cultural and ideological terms, is therefore not fully realised by Qiu through the character of Bao.

In *Red Mandarin Dress*, the criminal, Jia Ming, shares a similar experience with Bao. His family is doomed during the Cultural Revolution. However, instead of remaining at the bottom of society, Jia receives a university education and becomes a successful lawyer. Defending the residents

in a real estate case which involves dealings between businessmen and governmental officials, Jia takes his revenge against the government. At one time, Inspector Chen is given orders to look into Jia's profile (*RMD* 6). It is not until the end of the story that Inspector Chen unravels Jia Ming's personal history. The reader is informed that Jia's family:

suffered disastrous blows [...] His grandfather died, his father committed suicide, his mother suffered mortifying mass-criticisms, and he himself turned in a 'black puppy' (*RMD* 265, 266).

In order to protect her son from humiliation and abuse by the "revolutionary people" (*RMD* 266), Jia's mother becomes a prey to a lecherous Red Guard, Tian. Unfortunately, Jia witnesses the sex scene between his mother and Tian, and runs away from home. His mother follows him, trips on the stairs and dies as a result of her fall. This series of tragic incidents is what contributes to Jia's distorted attitudes towards women and turns him into a serial killer. But instead of picturing Jia as a cold-blooded misogynist, the author chooses to make him a compassionate lawyer disturbed by his family history. Even when his crime is revealed at the end of the story, Jia is not shown being apprehended by officers of the law. Rather, he commits suicide in the courtroom and leaves behind him a huge amount of money for those families who suffered losses in the real estate case, as well as the victims of the red mandarin case.

The fact that the criminal is also the victim complicates Qiu's message about crime. For Qiu, the characters of both Bao and Jia symbolize the massive and far-reaching effects of the Cultural Revolution. Throughout his Inspector Chen series, Qiu maintains a persistent connection between the individual crimes he has fictionalised and the state crimes carried out during the Cultural Revolution. But this message is only significantly developed when Qiu tries to

interpret the consequences of the Cultural Revolution in the context of Shanghai's recent history, at a time when capitalism returns to the city. The rising social divisions that develop as a result of Shanghai's socio-economic transformation thus intensifies Qiu's message concerning the legitimacy of the Cultural Revolution. By using recent individual crime cases as a way to approach the state crimes of the Cultural Revolution, the author emphasizes a connection between individual crime and state crime, as well as a sense of urgency in calling for a reinvestigation of this history before it is totally forgotten.

Space in Crime I: the Crime Site

Besides using various characters to enhance his socio-political message, Qiu also displays the crime site as an important narrative strategy. For Qiu, the crime site functions as an important agent in achieving a dynamic and multi-dimensional depiction of Shanghai. The crime site informs the reader not only of the geographical layout of the city, but also its historical, cultural and political background. The locale of the crime thus leads to an investigation of its surrounding areas and the inner structure of local buildings such as the *shikumen* house.⁸² Through the complementary perspectives of Inspector Chen and Detective Yu, a microscopic picture of the crime site emerges alongside a macroscopic view of the entire city. The crime site thus becomes a crucial time-space node in which the reader can perceive the logic and dynamics of

⁸² The *shikumen* house is a typical *longtang* building which was firstly built in the 1870s. It looks like a terraced house but incorporates both Western and Chinese styles. For example, the basic house structure retains the Chinese *Siheyuan* style by which the front door of the house faces south and the living room and dining room sit in the middle part of the house, flanked by bedrooms on both sides. See G. Zhu 53.

interactions between history, culture, political power and individuals. It greatly exceeds its function as a mere fictional setting.

As I outlined in my discussion of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* in the previous chapter, a *longtang* building offers an important geographical setting for the story, and this is similarly the case in *When Red is Black*. In this novel, the *shikumen* house not only harbours the crime site, but its changes and transformations show the recent changes of Shanghai. For example, Detective Yu's perspective reveals a *shikumen* house in Treasure Garden Lane where a murder happens in Yin's *tingzijian*⁸³ room of the building:

When the bus finally arrived at his destination, Detective Yu found that Treasure Garden Lane, where Yin had lived, was only half a block from the bus stop. It was an old-fashioned, medium-sized lane accessed through a black iron grillwork gate, possibly a leftover from the French Concession years. [...] As new buildings appeared elsewhere, the lane had become something of an eyesore (*WRIB* 22-23).

Situated near the bus stop, the location of the house informs us that the house is located in the central area of the city. The author also uses the road names to further locate the place, stating that it is at "the intersection of Jinling and Fujian Roads" (*WRIB* 23). This description is grounded in reality. If we refer to a current Shanghai map, Qiu's fictionalized Treasure Garden Lane can be identified as located in Huangpu District,⁸⁴ in the very heart of the city centre. Further descriptions in the quotation indicate that the history of the building signifies its erection during "the French Concession years", which sheds light

⁸³ As Qiu explains later in this novel, a *tingzijian* is a room partitioned off at the curve in a staircase of a *shikumen* house. It is largely unfavoured by the Shanghainese because of its disadvantageous location, lack of natural light and limited space.

⁸⁴ The city area of Shanghai has been divided into 13 districts: Huangpu District occupies the central area of the city, and is composed mostly of commercial buildings. The Huangpu River runs through the district, separating it from the newly developed Pudong district. The District is also where the Bund and the colonial buildings are located. For more information, see "City/Metro Map of Shanghai".

on the prestigious status that this *shikumen* building once enjoyed, as a haven during war time and a symbol of wealth and power in times of peace.

But the current state of the building suggests a different picture. The strong contrast between the *shikumen* house in Treasure Garden Lane and the “new buildings” around it explicitly illustrates the changes that have taken place in adjacent areas. A fast-changing urban landscape is revealed to the reader, foregrounding possible tensions behind these physical changes and the likely incentives for crime. Living amidst massive commercial buildings at the very urban centre of Shanghai, the residents in Treasure Garden Lane are perhaps among the first to embrace the impact of the urban transformation precipitated by China’s Reform and Opening-up Policy. By employing such a building as the crime site, Qiu accentuates the tension between changed and unchanged, powerful and powerless, and rich and poor. Emblematic of Shanghai’s former glory, these *shikumen* houses are degenerating into urban ghettos, signalling rising social divisions. As Inspector Chen observes:

As the taxi started winding out of the slum area, he had a weird feeling, as if the city had suddenly turned into two disparate halves. The first city was made up of old *shikumen* houses, narrow lanes, and slum alleys like the one he was leaving, in which people still had a hard time making ends meet. The second city was composed of trendy places like the bars on Henshan Road, the new high-end apartment complex in Hongqiao, and the would-be New World (*WRIB* 214).

The contrast between rich and poor in the city displays itself in manifest forms of geographical divisions. Newly emergent commercial buildings and “high-end apartments” (*WRIB* 214) are proof of the disadvantaged position of the average residents in Treasure Garden Lane amidst ongoing urban transformation. By choosing the almost ghetto-like *shikumen* house as the narrative’s crime site, Qiu seems to point to the connection between poverty

and crime. But such a connection is not an immediately obvious one to the reader, given the proximity of affluent areas of the city to such poor neighbourhoods. For instance, as Detective Yu walks around the area, he notices that “two or three blocks away, he could see the Zhonghui Mansion—the high-rise once owned by Big Brother Du of the Blue Triad—standing on the corner” (*WRIB* 23).

The seemingly random *flâneur*-like observation of the cityscape from a detective’s point of view partially transforms the investigation of crime into an investigation of the city. Signifying the rise of a criminal gang in Shanghai between the 1920s and the 1940s, Qiu’s use of the historical Zhonghui Mansion complicates his representation of the relationship between poverty, crime and history. It delivers a message that the poor are not necessarily criminals and that the apparently rich may not be innocent. The city’s geographical landscape may clearly illustrate the division between rich and poor on the urban surface, but it does not necessarily reveal the inner logic between poverty and crime. The Zhonghui Mansion, which in reality evidences the legendary rise of the gang leader Du Yueshen⁸⁵ from obscurity to extreme fame in Shanghai in the 1920s and 40s, serves as a reminder of the city’s history of political corruption. It is also used by the author to keep the reader alert to the potential ongoing connection between the current government and underground, gang-related crime.

The juxtaposition of this building (with its suggestions of criminal activity) with Inspector Chen’s friendship with the businessman, Gu, thus

⁸⁵ Du Yueshen (1888-1951) was a notorious leader of the Blue Triad, a criminal gang that operated in Shanghai between the 1920s and 1940s. He assisted the Chinese Nationalist government in the Anti-Japanese war and later fled to Hong Kong in 1949, where he died two years later.

implies broader possibilities of crime and corruption in Shanghai. Gu's connectedness not only with governmental officials, but also indirectly with gangsters and criminals, is situated within the reality of a climbing rate of organized crime in the city. According to an article in *China.org*, prosecutors in Shanghai "have filed charges [...] against 103 suspects in 29 cases involving serious organized crime and crimes of violence in public places" during one week in April 2006 ("Shanghai Organized Crime"). The same article also claims that organized crime "has been on the rise in the past year [sic] in Shanghai": from four cases in 2003 to ten times that number in 2006. By contrasting Treasure Garden Lane and its surrounding areas with a building that evokes Shanghai's history of urban crime, Qiu thus prepares the reader for a more complicated interpretation of the relationship between poverty and crime, and between the criminal and the victim, than first appears in the novel.

Contemporary critics of the detective genre increasingly believe that the crime site serves as a vital means of conveying the socio-political message of the author. In his conference paper, "From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction", David Schmid argues that:

space in crime fiction narratives is much more than setting, indeed, it is one of the main ways in which the genre achieves any degree of critical and political effectivity. Through its mobilization of various forms of space, in other words, crime fiction writers both enable and energize their larger critiques and analyses of culture, power, economy, gender, and race.

Schmid's apprehension of the geographical and spatial settings of the detective genre answers the essential question regarding the significance and meaning of the genre. For Schmid, the purpose of the spatial strategies employed by detective writers is to critique the larger society. In Qiu's case, he employs the crime site so skilfully that it becomes a major means through which to achieve

his depiction of a changing Shanghai, influenced both by the past as well as the present, with a drastically transforming China in its background. Strategically, Qiu carries out his narrative investigation of the city space as mediated by the crime site, through his two key characters. The concealed versus open positions of Chen and Yu enable a comprehensive reading of the urban landscape. Both the larger city area surrounding the crime site and the interior structure of the building are described vividly. Such shifts and moves between outside and inside, and macro and micro depictions of the crime site allow the reader to follow the investigation, through the medium of space, into the historical, cultural and political dimensions of the city.

The perspectives of Qiu's two major characters are varied in important ways. By walking, Detective Yu offers the reader an immediate, intuitive perspective for capturing the specific geographical features of the city. The details Yu observes are substantial and vivid, like the location of the house and its relative proximity to Zhonghui Mansion. These details are gleaned as a result of Yu's direct personal experience of the crime site and its surrounding areas, developed on his perambulations through the means of walking. Inspector Chen, on the other hand, takes a "taxi" (*WRIB* 214). Facilitated by this modern vehicle, he has gained an abstract and impressionistic view across a larger area of the city. The speed of the taxi enables a sweeping and holistic perspective of the city, which cannot easily be gained through walking. The highly mobile taxi is what leads to Inspector Chen's "weird feeling" of the city's "disparate halves" (*WRIB* 214). It offers the reader a narrative perspective which captures a much larger area of the city, and thus offers a summary of Shanghai's overall physical and topographical characteristics. A

general impression of the city in its entirety is therefore achieved through a quickly changing viewpoint in a fast-moving taxi.

As Michel de Certeau puts it metaphorically: “the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (92). De Certeau has pointed to the importance of perspectives in generating a perceptive understanding of the city, although he also notices the partiality and potential fallacy of such understanding since any viewpoint has its own constraints and thus produces the “fiction of knowledge” of the city. In this novel, Qiu provides more than one viewpoint to construct the image of Shanghai. The differing viewpoints of Chen and Yu enable a comprehensive interpretation of the city’s physical layout, with indications of its social tensions and historical traditions.

Yet a further investigation of the different perspectives of Chen and Yu suggests that such a difference results from the varied ways in which time is organized. Chen and Yu’s perspectives demonstrate different time-space perceptions. Walking is different from taking a taxi in that it takes a longer time for a walker to cover the same distance than a passenger in a taxi. Therefore, it allows for a longer fixation on the space observed within the same time period. Walking creates a perspective with a focus steady and stable enough to enable a careful observation of spatial details. A modern vehicle such as a moving taxi, however, deprives the focus and fixation necessary to generate a steady point of view. Acquired from the modern engine, its speed is conducive to a transient and temporary fixation on the city space. Such transience and temporality in perspective create, in return, a fleeting overview across a larger area of the city space which allows little focus on detail. Instead,

it forges a dynamic, mobile yet consistent perception of the city in general. As a result, the protagonists' senses of space are determined, critically, by the way in which time works.

Recent social theorists have argued that an individual's sense of spatiality is heavily reliant on different experiences of time. Space becomes meaningful only because of a certain time framework within which it is positioned. Doreen Massey, for one, believes that "space and time are inextricably interwoven" (qtd. in May and Thrift 2). Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift argue that urban geography is the "geography of time, timing and time-consciousness" (qtd. in May and Thrift 3). In Jon May and Nigel Thrift's words, this intricate relationship can be better described in the conceptual framework they term "TimeSpace" (3). Qiu's contribution in depicting the urban space of Shanghai via his crime series resides in the fact that his dynamic, multi-dimensional perspective is informed by a perceptive understanding of this time-space relationship. He weaves changes of perspective seamlessly together through his characters and nurtures them as responsible agents of observation. A multi-dimensional Shanghai is therefore extended before the reader on a solid TimeSpace grid.

On the other hand, while our perception of space is informed and deepened by time—which, in the above case, pertains to each individual's different usage of time in perceiving the space—our understanding of time, or more specifically historical time, also relies heavily on different spatial settings. In the context of the Shanghai depicted by Qiu, different buildings and geographical layouts provide vital clues to specific social, political and cultural histories of the city. Importantly, what the concept of "TimeSpace" denotes is

not simply the mutual impact of time and space upon each other, but rather a further complicated time-space perception due to the subjectivity of the observer. Space has impacted upon the individual, which in return, defines the individual's perspective on the temporal grid of that space.

The forefather of modern psychogeography, Guy Debord, believes there are certain "effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals". Contemporary psychogeographer and writer Peter Ackroyd has intended to "define the character of London" by practising a "phrenology" (qtd. in Self) of the city. In one of his essays which later became his book *Psychogeography* (2007), Will Self cites his friend Nick Papadimitriou, who pursues "what he prefers to term 'deep topography': minutely detailed, multi-level examinations of select locales that impact upon the writer's own microscopic inner-eye". Even the contemporary eco-critic, Lawrence Buell argues that "placeness, implies physical site [...], it also implies affect, a deeply personal phenomenon founded on one's life-world and everyday practices" (60).⁸⁶ Like the Chicago School researchers, these psychogeographers believe that an individual is influenced by the reconfigurations of his social environment. However, they particularly accentuate the relationship between geography and an individual's emotional, as well as behavioural, performances. They believe that the way in which space is organized directly affects one's emotions, perceptions and behaviour. For them, space plays a critical role in forming what we might call the urban persona.

⁸⁶ Lawrence Buell's interpretation of place, as he puts it, "implies (among other connotations) 'space to which meaning has been ascribed', assigned distinctness and value." See Buell 59.

For Qiu, his perception of Shanghai's urban space depends critically upon his own knowledge of the city. Qiu's depiction of the crime site—a *shikumen* house—offers a spatial node in which history can reside, and be constructed. But importantly, it also signifies a confluence of people and place where the author can embed the contrasting perspectives offered by his two detective characters, who function respectively as insider and outsider, in order to capture the very temporal and spatial nodes conducive to the depiction of the city. Such a subjective authorial stance is better revealed when Qiu depicts the inner space of the *shikumen* house. The detailed description of the interior arrangement of the *shikumen* house indicates the author's knowledge of, and affection for, the building. Notably, the focus on different details enacted by Chen and Yu further complement each other's observations, thus leading to different focuses on the city's history.

The crime site, Yin's humble abode where she was ruthlessly strangled to death—a *tingzijian* in a *shikumen* house—is first revealed to the reader by Detective Yu. Yu's exploration of the *shikumen* house is tinged with a strong personal emotion since he has been living in “a similar building for many years” (*WRIB* 29). For Yu, he is so familiar with the structure of the house that he regards Old Liang's “explanation” as “hardly necessary” (*WRIB* 29). Such an assured knowledge of the house's structure provides Yu with an insider's perspective in his observations of it. Upon his entrance, he notices:

Squeezed into that space were the coal stoves of a dozen or more families, as well as their pots and pans, rows of coal briquettes, and pigeonhole cabinets hung on the wall. Yu counted fifteen stoves in all. At the end of the kitchen area was the staircase, which differed from the one in his own house, as an additional room had been partitioned off at the curve in the staircase. A *tingzijian*, at the landing above the kitchen, between

the first and second floors, was commonly regarded as one of the worst rooms in a *shikumen* building (WRIB 29-30).

This description reveals the overcrowded living conditions of the *shikumen* house. As the word “squeezed” vividly informs us, the *shikumen* house is overpopulated. Originally designed for one extended family, it is now shared by fifteen in total. The squeezed “pots and pans” indicate the possible tension between families in retaining their own private space while sharing a limited public space with their neighbours. The crime site, a *tingzijian* room where Yin lives, is considered the worst location in the house. Again, Yu’s observation of the *shikumen* house at this point of the narrative is detailed, intuitive and straightforward. There is no in-depth interpretation of what he has observed. This is later complemented by Chen’s perspective:

Chen’s interest in the room was also piqued by the term *tingzijian writer*. There were poverty-stricken writers, unable to rent better rooms, in the thirties, and then in the nineties, too. The marginal status of a *tingzijian* room, something barely inhabitable between two floors, appeared symbolic. He wondered how such a room—or the attempt to write in such a room—could have been romanticized in fiction. Not everything could have been glamorous in times past, but nostalgia made it seem so. *Things are miraculously mellowed in memories*. That was a line from a Russian poem he had read, but failed to understand, in his high-school years. A subtle transformation in comprehension had occurred with the lapse of years (WRIB 176).

Inspector Chen, now the owner of a modern apartment (WRIB 41), observes the *shikumen* house from an outsider’s point of view. His perspective allows him to notice something beyond the surface. Here, his observations concerning the *tingzijian* inform us of the history of such a room and its place in China’s cultural history. By revealing its association with a group of local writers, Chen’s observation adds a certain historical depth and intellectual interpretation to Yu’s initial thoughts. His analysis of the symbolic meaning of

the *tingzijian*, which he identifies as suggesting the marginal status of Chinese intellectuals in the thirties and the nineties, provokes further investigation into the modern history of China and leads the reader to those key points Qiu intends to raise through his narrative.

Interestingly, Chen's contemplation of such a room and its multifaceted usage provokes thoughts about nostalgia, which makes him a very effective surrogate for the author's own opinions. The authorial choice of the *shikumen* house as the site of crime has, at various levels, suggested Qiu's personal attachment to the *shikumen* house. This reminds us of Wang Anyi's nostalgic reference to the *longtang* house in *The Song*. However, there is a stark difference in the translations of nostalgia enacted by these two writers. Wang's interpretation of nostalgia for the city's past is constructed out of a fictionalized version of the city. As I argued in Chapter Two, her story of Shanghai is itself an interrogation of the massively commodified nostalgic trend, both in fiction and commercial activities. Thus it should be read as a critique of her contemporaries. For Qiu, the sense of nostalgia is explored from a personal angle. It is based on the author's memory of his own *shikumen* experience in the first thirty years of his life, albeit in its overcrowded conditions. Chen's perceptive understanding of the way in which the sentiment of nostalgia romanticizes the past and renders it a glamorous memory, indicates the author's own romanticizing of that *shikumen* experience. It also partly reveals his motives for choosing the *shikumen* house as the major geographical setting for his crime.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Although there is no direct evidence to show that Qiu has personally lived in a *shikumen* house, his recent publication of a non-fiction work, *Years of Red Dust* (2008), shows his familiarity with the *shikumen* life. See Rui.

Nevertheless, the contrast between the interior of the *shikumen* house and its exterior environment shows a widening gap in 1980s and 1990s Shanghai. This spatial contrast provides a legitimate clue to the motive of the crime. As I argued earlier in this chapter, the culprit, Bao Guohua, is one of Shanghai's most disadvantaged inhabitants and has had no share in the economic success of the city. The increasing economic inequality within his generation is what directly triggers his criminal act. But such an obvious criminal motive does not suffice to explain Qiu's elaborate deployment of urban spaces and his use of various historical and cultural clues.

Through Yu's and Chen's complementary perspectives, Qiu gives a detailed and realistic revelation of the inner space of the *shikumen* house and its changing external surroundings. This signifies the transitional phase that the city is undergoing, which is preceded by a decade of progressive economic resuscitation following the Cultural Revolution. As the sociologist Pamela Yatsko states in her study of Shanghai's living conditions between the 1970s and the 1980s:

Shanghainese, the supposedly most modern of Chinese people, enjoyed the undignified distinction of existing in some of the country's worst urban conditions. In 1979, they each lived in only 4.3 square meters of space on average and enjoyed less than half a square meter of greenery, roughly the size of a newspaper. In 1986, more than 60% of Shanghai homes did not have toilets, forcing residents to rely on traditional chamber pots. The city's narrow streets were clogged with buses and bicycles, causing traffic to flow at a snail's pace (16).

Yatsko's research has shown the reality of the city's humble residential conditions from the late 1970s until the early 1990s. Such a social study also reveals the problematic aspect of Qiu's depiction. On the one hand, Qiu endeavours to accentuate the social transition which started in Shanghai in the

early 1990s but only became conspicuous in the late 1990s and was not manifestly obvious until the twenty-first century. On the other hand, his depiction of the *shikumen* life is mostly representative of the 1980s—a decade marked by grave housing shortages which, by speculation, the author perhaps personally experienced as a young man. The over-crowded living conditions of the *shikumen* house inform us mainly of an economically resuscitating period for the city after the Cultural Revolution. This was a time when the city's population was expanding while the economy was growing slowly. Yatsko has recorded the changes in housing conditions in the 1990s:

During the 1990s, Shanghai finally started resolving its dire housing situation. Rising incomes and housing reform policies have helped some residents buy their own flats, while the city government moved more than 85% of families living in less than four square meters per person to larger accommodations (33).

Although it is fair to say that Qiu's depiction of the *shikumen* house is realistic and vivid, his representation of the impact of the city's changing landscape, as well as Shanghai's increasingly improved housing conditions, does not show the whole picture. To some degree, the vivid and detailed depiction of the *shikumen* house suggests that the author might have been over-reliant on his memory when detailing his own fictional Shanghai. This arguably results in a sweeping and generalised depiction of Shanghai's changing landscape. At times, there are apparent time-lapses between a changed urban environment and unchanged *shikumen* housing conditions. There is a feeling that the author has conflated the typical 1980s *shikumen* life with a typical 1990s Shanghai landscape. For example, Inspector Chen has involved himself with a part-time translation for the "New World" project which clearly alludes to the real-world

Xin Tian Di ⁸⁸ commercial complex in Shanghai. There is thus a time slip between Qiu's depiction of the 1980s *shikumen* lifestyle and his representation of *Xin Tian Di* which was officially initiated in 1999.

Importantly, however, in addition to informing us of the temporal grid through his spatial strategies via the perspectives of Yu and Chen, Qiu's representation of the inner space of the *shikumen* house reminds us of the *shikumen* personality that has also appeared in Wang Anyi's novel. For example, the first suspect, Lanlan, represents the average *shikumen* personality in the *shikumen* house. The conflicts she has experienced with the victim Yin are mostly related to the competition for private space that typically takes place in the shared public space of the *shikumen* house. At the request of Inspector Chen, Old Liang introduces this situation:

Because of overcrowded living conditions, each of the families tried hard to occupy as much space as possible—"in a fair way." Old Liang provided an example. Yin had a coal briquette stove as well as a small table in the common kitchen area. It was her space, inherited from the previous *tingzijian* occupant; she took it even though she hardly cooked. Like her predecessor, she also kept a smaller gasoline stove outside her door on the staircase landing. Like all the others, she would not give up an inch she could claim as hers. This must have vexed some of her neighbors (*WRIB* 58).

The "overcrowded living conditions", according to Old Liang, are to be blamed for the squabbles and conflicts between people in the *shikumen* house. But what lies behind the over-crowdedness is a vicious competition for more room and space for private use. According to Old Liang, although she hardly uses her stove Yin still chooses to put it "outside the door". Such selfish behaviour indicates the stress and tensions among the neighbours and demonstrates the

⁸⁸ *Xin Tian Di* is a commercial complex built in Shanghai by the Hong Kong-based *Rui An* Group. The designers have refurbished a series of local *shikumen* buildings and transformed them into exotic bars. This matches the author's description of the New World project in the novel.

impact of space on inter-personal relationships. On a strategic level, it also legitimizes Qiu's selection of suspects as residing among Yin's neighbours. Leaving aside other considerations in portraying the numerous suspects on Old Liang's list, the choice of suspects is itself symbolic of the deteriorating interpersonal relationships caused by constraints on space in the *shikumen* house, as well as in the city in general.

What is worth noting is that the *shikumen* life represents an average 1980s Shanghai lifestyle, whereby the sense of private space is negotiated in relation to, as well as in conflict with, the city's public space. The borderline between the private and the public in a *shikumen* house is extremely blurred as a result of rapidly-expanding population in the city. Such a spatial organization nurtures certain typical characteristics among the Shanghainese who are believed to be easily distinguishable from non-Shanghainese on account of their manners and behaviours.

Yet space cannot act upon individuals without the additional presence of a temporal framework. Nor is the collective personality of the residents in *shikumen* houses built in one day. Space casts its impact upon individuals through, and only through, time. Through his unique perspective, Inspector Chen reveals a further time-space relationship within the house that is conducive to our understanding of the relationship between space and individuals. As Old Liang informs Chen in response to his inquiry:

"The British authorities took the lead in having collective dwellings built for the Chinese on designated lots." [...] "In the early days, not too many Chinese could have afforded to move into a concession. [...] As a result of the housing shortage, some of the rooms came to be leased, then subleased, with rooms undergoing further partitioning or subdivision." [...] "Life here is colorful. There is so much interaction between residents. You practically become part of the neighborhood and the

neighborhood, of you. [...] It's a bit of a squeeze, but that's not necessarily too bad. When you cook here, you can learn how to prepare the dishes of various provincial cuisines from your neighbors" (*WRIB* 170, 171).

An even earlier history of the *shikumen* building is revealed. As a colonial building, the *shikumen* house signifies the city's history of shame and humiliation during its foreign concession years. Yet foreign concessions were a haven for the Chinese during the Anti-Japanese War. The Chinese who could "afford" to move into such concession buildings were those with a certain social wealth, power and network of connections. Old Liang's introduction of the house's earlier history shows the advantageous position of its former residents, and the sense of pride inherited by those people who still live there. However, that sense of pride is undermined by the indignity that the *shikumen* building signifies in its current deteriorated conditions. Moreover, a more contradictory picture occurs, as implied by the "partitioning or subdivision" of the rooms in the houses, which evidences the expansion of the urban population under a relatively stagnant economic development. Qiu's depiction is located in the social reality of the 1980s, when Shanghai was undergoing a great population expansion because of internal immigration. But the "colorful" life referenced in the above quotation suggests otherwise. The material constraint did not, according to this depiction, prevent people from feeling contented and keeping harmonious lives in their own ways at a time when collectivism and social equality prevailed in the socialist state.

Here, Shanghai's histories and different time-periods are yoked together through the depiction of space. But such an abstraction of a series of historical moments is not a random choice by the author. It gives a clear clue as to the main forces decisive to the formation of the *shikumen* personality. A

series of contradictions coexist: shame and prestige, indignity and superiority, competition and harmony. Such contradictions can be found within an equally contradictory personality type summarized by the well-known contemporary Shanghainese writer, Yu Qiuyu, in his essay “The Shanghainese” (1992). He concludes that: “though they are shrewd, proud, butter-tonsiled, lax, not kind and exclusive...they are also open-minded, hard-studying, easygoing, smart, loyal to Chinese traditions while assimilating foreign culture and dealing with reality” (qtd. in Xu).⁸⁹

More specifically here, the “shrewd, not kind and exclusive” qualities of the Shanghainese are suggestive of the period of economic resuscitation during which the Shanghainese had to compete with one another for more living space as a result of the soaring population. This is typically exemplified by the *shikumen* lifestyle represented by Qiu. The “open-minded, hard-studying” and mediating role in “assimilating foreign culture” is often regarded as symbolic of Shanghai’s *Haipai* Culture, which is believed to be part of Shanghai’s cultural heritage from the foreign concession years. Such a summary of the *shikumen* personalities is reminiscent of the *longtang* character in Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. The sense of pragmatism and openness in “assimilating foreign culture” described here is also what underpins Wang Qiyao’s personality. Clearly, both Qiu and Wang have successfully captured the Shanghai personality forged by the city’s unique historical and cultural traditions through their characters.

⁸⁹ “Shanghainese” is collected in Yu Qiuyu’s famous book *An Arduous Cultural Journal* (1992). It is an essay collection which gathers together his commentaries on Chinese culture and history. The book made Yu famous and was a best-seller in the year that it was published. For the complete article, see Yu.

But a careful observation of Qiu's representation of the *shikumen* life during the Cultural Revolution shows a dramatic narrative twist. Against a consistently realistic representation, Qiu's depiction of the *shikumen* life on a typical day of the Cultural Revolution is achieved through a poem:

My fantasy came true / with the Cultural Revolution / of being a
cat, jumping / through the attic window, stalking / on the dark
roof, staring / down into the rooms now peopled / with the
strangers wearing / the armbands of "Red Guards." / They had
told me "Go away, / bastard, you hear!" I heard, / only too glad
to come / to the roof, where I found, / for the first time, that
starlight / could shine so long in solitude, / and that Mother had
changed / beside the Red Guards, her neck / bent by a
blackboard like / a zoological label. I couldn't tell / the words
written on it, but I knew / she's in no position to stop / my
leaping into the dark night. Morning brought me down /
brandishing a slate, Mother sprang back / at the sight, as if the
slate too / were designed for her swollen neck. / I couldn't help
shouting / in a voice I had learned overnight, / "Go, and fetch a
bowl of rice / for me, you hear!" Away she / scampered. A
mouse scuttled / in the debris of a night's "cultural revolution."
And / I decided, not being human enough / to be a Red Guard,
to be / feline ferocious. Back / from a visit to the dentist / one
day, I caught her squealing, "No, / your teeth are sharp." "Alas,
/ she was born under the star of the mouse," a blind / fortune-
teller said, sighing / by her deathbed. "It was / predestined,
according / to the Chinese horoscope." / I ran out wild. There
were / nine lives to lose, and I jumped / into the jungle. I see a
paw-print / on this white paper (*WRIB* 301).

Narrated in a frame story through the voice of Yang—a fictionalized victim of the Cultural Revolution—the poem has a surrealistic feel in its representation of a typical day in the *shikumen* building, with its programme of mass criticism.⁹⁰ The metaphorical use of a cat, and references to "bastard", "zoological", "mouse", and "feline" all point to the dehumanization of individuals during the Cultural Revolution. The protagonist's changed attitude towards his mother further suggests how the political campaign has twisted

⁹⁰ Mass criticisms were an extremely common form of public abuse employed by Red Guards against "counterrevolutionaries" during the Cultural Revolution. In a mass-criticism gathering, people were summoned to observe the verbal and physical abuse of alleged "counterrevolutionaries" by the Red Guards.

humanity and alienated people from their closest family members. The fortune-teller's fatalistic interpretation of the mother's tragic death during the Cultural Revolution, on the other hand, is suggestive of a prevalent mentality of escapism and the moral blindness of Chinese people spellbound and paralysed by the political campaign. Importantly, such a fatalistic mindset pinpoints the passive reception of realities that is deeply embedded within the Chinese personality. Instead of pursuing a realistic, scientific and rational explanation for what has happened, the mother here is inclined, in Qiu's depiction, to choose a determinist mentality as a passive means of reconciliation with trauma and brutality.

While Qiu's forceful critique of the Cultural Revolution serves as a sharp contrast to Wang Anyi's near silence in *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, his depiction of a fatalistic ideology reminds the reader of the narrative strategies Wang Anyi also employs in her novel. Wang Anyi has predetermined the death of Wang Qiyao in her metafictional novel. The entire story of Qiyao is imbued with a fatalistic feel. Qiyao strongly believes that individual efforts cannot resist the force of one's destiny. Her passive acceptance of life's fortunes and misfortunes therefore affords her strength to survive in the turbulent city. As an allegory for Shanghai, Qiyao's resilience represents the city's resilience amidst historical turmoil. Although Qiu would by no means applaud such a fatalistic and deterministic mindset, his depiction of the mother's resilience in the face of her suffering is what sustains the impact of the poem, and also serves as a powerful means of resistance to the state crime of the Cultural Revolution. In this way, Qiu has revealed a contradiction within his representation of Shanghai throughout his novels:

while his love and nostalgia for the city emerges vividly through his description of food (which I will discuss in a moment), culture, the *longtang* lifestyle, and Chinese ideologies (like those shown in Confucian sayings), he also critiques certain deep-rooted traditions, (mis)conceptions, and customs that partially encourage state crimes and hinder both the city and the country from becoming fully modernized. In this case, it is the unquestioning attitude represented by the mother that he is critiquing.

Unlike his realistic depiction of other historical moments of the *shikumen* life, Qiu adopts an indirect yet forceful approach to represent the history of the Cultural Revolution here. By capturing a specific moment of the *shikumen* house, the poem encapsulates significant historical and personal detail saturated with deep emotion. There are several possible interpretations for such a drastic change in his narrative style. Firstly, from an authorial level, the sudden change of the narrative style indicates that even the author's nostalgia for the *shikumen* life fails to lessen the brutality of the history which he might have personally experienced (the author has described how his father was humiliated in mass-criticisms during the Cultural Revolution in the Foreword of his Chinese version of *When Red is Black* [Qiu, "Foreword" 1-4]). This, therefore, arguably prevents Qiu from offering a fully objective depiction, since this would trigger his own deeply embedded family trauma. Secondly, a poem loaded with metaphors enforces an impression of suppressed emotion, drastically setting this narrative passage apart from the dispassionate narrative voice which otherwise characterises the novel. Such a sudden change of linguistic style captures the reader's attention and signposts the key position of this message by the author. In this way, it impacts his readers with a sudden

sense of lingering rage, repression, and terror and highlights the far-reaching impact of the Cultural Revolution.

As a crime site the *shikumen* house has thus far served well as a spatial node in which to accommodate a wider span of historical realities of the city, rendering Shanghai an essential character in communicating the author's socio-political message. In *Red Mandarin Dress*, Qiu's use of the crime site further accentuates his socio-political theme. However, in contrast to *When Red is Black*, the crime sites in this novel outline Shanghai's urban transition more explicitly, associating it with the alarming growth of urban crime in the city. The story begins with a serial murder case. The first three victims are discovered at the very heart of the city centre, respectively in Huaihai Road (just opposite Shanghai Music Institute), Nanjing Road and the Bund. Both Huaihai Road and Nanjing Road are Shanghai's most concentrated commercial areas. The Bund, with all its colonial buildings alongside the west side of the Huangpu River, and modern skyscrapers on the east side, showcases Shanghai's reputation as a world port and signifies its glamorous past alongside its futurist ambitions.

In the plot, the criminal chooses to abandon his victims' corpses in the urban centre. This behaviour reveals the killer's open defiance of law and justice and his anti-social attitude, which associates him with the stereotype of a sociopath. Such a representation of the criminal and of the crime sites indicates an increasing overttness of urban crime in Shanghai in recent years. And the killer's penchant for a red mandarin dress as well as his choice of female victims exclusively, two of whom are associated with the city's

emerging sex industries, further reveals a changing urban landscape that poses a constant threat to traditional values and morals.

Importantly, the central urban location of the crime sites is not only signified by their historical status in the city, but also by the constant changes that are shaping and reshaping these places. If we take the first crime site as an example, Tian Mo, the first victim, is found at a “safety island...near the intersection of Huaihai and Donghu Roads” (*RMD* 2) where “the Shanghai Music Institute” is just “across the street” (*RMD* 3). A retired “model worker” (*laodong mofan*) Huang, also a morning jogger, discovers the body.⁹¹ Locating the body from afar, Huang’s perspective offers a sweeping view of the surrounding areas that once again reveals the city’s drastic changes:

Not too far away, his old *shikumen*-style house, where he had been living along with a dozen working-class families, was about to be pulled down for a commercial high-rise. Soon the residents were going to be relocated to Pudong, an area that was once farmland east of the Huangpu River. After that there would be no possibility of a morning jog along this familiar street, in the center of the city. Nor could he enjoy a bowl of soy soup served by the Worker and Farmer Eatery around the corner. [...] Perhaps he was too old to understand the change (*RMD* 2).

This observation of the adjacent areas surrounding the crime site draws our attention to a series of changes happening to the city, thus reemphasizing the transitional phase Shanghai has undergone in *When Red is Black*. In Huang’s view, such changes do not necessarily entail positive benefits. At the very least he might not be able to “enjoy a bowl of soy soup served by the Worker and Farmer Eatery around the corner” (*RMD* 2). Huang’s identity as a model worker and his frustrations at adapting to the fast-changing urban landscape

⁹¹ A model worker is someone who works exceptionally hard in his job and is regarded as a model for his fellow workers. This is an honorary title to award those who have outstanding performances at work in China.

signify the demise of a formerly egalitarian city accentuated by poverty, to a divided urban space that replaces poverty with unaffordability.

In contrast to its depiction in *When Red is Black*, the *shikumen* house in *Red Mandarin Dress* begins to fade from Qiu's representation of Shanghai, giving way to modern high-rises. About to be "pulled down", the *shikumen*-style house symbolizes the physical overturning of an old Shanghai that Huang is familiar with by a new Shanghai that is announced by Pudong rising out of a patch of "farmland". Crucially, the description of Shanghai's changing urban landscape is here situated within the reality of the city's soaring property market. Shanghai's real estate market has developed so fast in the last decade that property prices, according to the article in *Business Week* "A Reality Check for Shanghai Real Estate", "had been clocking 30% annual increases from 2002 on". The same article reveals that in 2005 "Shanghai's property market was the hottest on the planet. Even [...] Morgan Stanley was part of a \$90 million real estate fund for Shanghai." Initially driven by the country's open-door policy, this drastic transformation of the property market resulted in significant crime and corruption. Qiu's depiction of the real estate crime in *Red Mandarin Dress* thus becomes highly relevant and believable against the backdrop of these social realities.

While the first three crime sites are located in the city centre, the fourth crime site, Lianyi Cemetery, reveals a different picture. Located in a suburb of Shanghai, Lianyi Cemetery is starkly different from the previous crime sites that focus on the changing urban landscape. Functioning as an exception to these cases, the metaphor of Lianyi Cemetery as a crime site does not lie in its geographical connotations, but in its association with the past. Lianyi Cemetery

relates directly to the dead, the past, and the buried. It is where the mother of Jia Ming—the victimized culprit—is buried. Therefore, it evokes Jia’s family history during the Cultural Revolution and the crimes and wrongs imposed on his mother and his family by the state during that time. In this way, the variation and unification of crime sites in *Red Mandarin Dress* plays a pivotal role in bringing together Shanghai’s past crimes with its present crimes, and possibly also alluding to its future crimes. The investigation of these crime sites and the excavation of the histories related to them generate an insight into the incentives for criminal behaviour, and an understanding of the relation between individual crime and state crime.

At the same time, the serial killing case and the panic it causes to the public also discloses the expanding scale and alarming rate of urban crime in the 1990s and twenty-first-century Shanghai. Foregrounding his story with a real estate case that involves several governmental officials, Qiu captures the soaring real estate market that has continuously transformed Shanghai’s urban landscape in the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, there is a subtle time lapse between the realities of the booming real estate market (from the late 1990s) and some of the detailed depictions of the *shikumen* life. For example, few people used “a plastic basin” to wash hair as Peiqin does (*RMD* 29) in late 1990s Shanghai. Nevertheless, the author’s efforts at incorporating those latest changes in Shanghai that have actually eluded his own personal experience are commendable. It reflects his consistent desire to depict a changing Shanghai in his detective series. It also relates the crime in this novel to a fast-changing landscape of Shanghai as well as to growing governmental corruption.

The overtness of urban crime is further accentuated by a direct and explicit discussion of governmental corruption in *Red Mandarin Dress*, which is rarely seen in *When Red is Black*:

In China's ongoing reform, some of the most unbelievable business opportunities were in housing development. In the past, with all the land controlled by the state, people had depended on the state housing assignment. Chen, too, had been assigned a room through the bureau quota. But in the early nineties, the government started selling land to emerging entrepreneurs. Peng—nicknamed the Number One Shanghai Big Buck—was one of the earliest and most successful developers. Since Party officials determined the land prices and allocation, corruption swarmed around like flies chasing blood. Through his connections, Peng obtained government approval for the West-Nine-Block development project. There, the old buildings had to be pulled down to make way for the new, and Peng drove out the original residents. It did not take long, however, for people to start complaining about the “black holes” in the business operation, and a scandal broke out (*RMD* 6).

Qiu's explicit representation of governmental corruption in *Red Mandarin Dress* offers a realistic picture of rising corruption in Shanghai in recent decades. The latest statistics show that in 2009 alone “a total of 106,626 officials were penalized for disciplinary violations [...] Nearly 14,000 commercial corruption cases were under investigation during the period, among which about 21 percent involved civil servants” (Pan). The infamous fall of the former Mayor of Shanghai, Chen Liangyu, could in itself reveal the gravity of governmental corruption and real estate crime in the first decade of twenty-first century.⁹² In 2008, he was charged with corruption and sentenced to 18 years in prison for abusing his position for profit (Macartney). Such a rise in crime and corruption calls for a further investigation into the recent history

⁹² According to Jay Macartney, Chen's scandal “involved more than 33.9 billion yuan (£2.4 billion) in Shanghai pension funds that had been improperly invested in property and toll road projects that included the city's new Formula One track” and “[a]s many as 16 former city government officials and prominent businessmen have been jailed for their roles in the case.” See Macartney.

of the city/country as it is portrayed in *When Red is Black*. A sense of the urgency of that investigation is all the stronger in *Red Mandarin Dress*. This impression is particularly strong when Inspector Chen excuses himself from a “politically sensitive” case earlier in the novel.⁹³

Qiu’s laborious efforts to stretch the temporal dimension of the crime site, to position it “against the grid of latitude and longitude” (Buell 59), is vitally important for him since it reveals not only the immediate and manifest cause of the crime, but also the more profound social and historical causes behind it. Almost simultaneously, a fuller picture of the city emerges alongside his narrative strategies, extending a comprehensive, multi-dimensional picture of the city and its dwellers. Yet, inevitably, this ambition to extend a fuller picture of Shanghai is challenged by the use of a solid, realistic depiction. In both novels, Qiu’s slip of time between his holistic view of the city and his microscopic portrait of the *shikumen* house suggests the challenge of acquiring a comprehensive interpretation of the city. However, it is safe to say that Qiu has made major contributions towards capturing the reality of Shanghai in a transitional age. He has seamlessly woven his theme of the Cultural Revolution into the transitional picture of contemporary Shanghai through his representation of urban crime sites.

Space in Crime II: the Restaurant

⁹³ In *Red Mandarin Dress*, Jia Ming, a lawyer representing a group of local residents, is leading a lawsuit against a real estate developer Peng who has an apparent connection with some government officials. One of the officials calls Inspector Chen, asking him to look into Jia Ming’s case early in the novel. Chen interprets this request as “damage control” to reduce the political damage possibly caused by the lawsuit. At the end of the novel, the residents win the case and Peng receives his punishment but the senior officials who are backing him are not revealed. Instead, they make Peng a scapegoat for their crimes. See Qiu, *RMD* 5-9, 298-300.

In addition to utilizing the crime site as an important spatial node, Qiu also employs the restaurant as a vital space to conjoin the individual with their wider culture in both *When Red is Black* and *Red Mandarin Dress*. The restaurant is a place where culture, in its most specific and minute details (culinary routines, recipes, and cooking procedures) is examined to assist the investigation not only of specific crimes, but also of larger crimes throughout the country's cultural history. Among the many restaurants mentioned in the novel, Inspector Chen chooses to meet Shen, an expert on the Mandarin dress, at a restaurant called Five Fragrance Resort to discuss the history of *Qipao* (*RMD* 60). Shen elaborates on the history of the dress in great detail and his knowledge even extends to the historical locations of the city's brothels. While it can be argued that many of the cultural and historical contexts that Qiu evokes in the novel serve as red herrings to attract the attention of his Western readers—for instance, poems, classic Chinese fiction, Confucian doctrines, urban architecture, as well as cuisine—these contexts are also used to provide the tangible cultural material through which the investigation of crimes and cultural histories are carried out.

One such cultural artefact which Qiu uses frequently is Chinese cuisine. In contrast to the vivid description of local delicacies in *When Red is Black*, Qiu depicts a number of “cruel dishes” (*RMD* 265) in *Red Mandarin Dress* in such detail that it causes aversion on the reader's part. Whether it is “the liquor-drowned shrimps”, a popular dish in Five Flavour Resort (*RMD* 61), or “the Buddha's Head” made up of “a fried sparrow—inside a grilled quail—inside a braised pigeon” (*RMD* 134), or the live brain of a caged monkey in the *bu* feast Chen is invited to in the vacation village (*RMD* 136), Qiu tries his best

to tease his Western readers with the most peculiar Chinese dishes he can possibly find.

Yet what is intriguing is the way Qiu uses these cruel dishes at the end of the story when Inspector Chen invites Jia, the suspect, to the Old Mansion (*RMD* 261) in order to figure out his motives for murder. Under the pretense of seeking advice from Jia for a story he is writing, Chen describes vividly how a boy's family has suffered during the Cultural Revolution and how his mother was humiliated and tragically died. By purposefully telling a story based on Jia's personal experience, Chen tries to sound out Jia's motives for serial killing. This storytelling process is accompanied by a series of "cruel dishes" being served to Jia (*RMD* 265). Apparently, Inspector Chen is playing a psychological game in order to pressurize Jia to reveal the truth.

Like the Golden Time Rolling Backward (*WRIB* 197), the Old Mansion used to be a private residence in the 1930s. It was also Jia's former home where a Red Guard, Tian, set a sinister trap for the family in order to take advantage of Jia's mother. In this light, The Old Mansion restaurant becomes the best place to replay that history for Jia. It is not simply the crime site of Jia's family tragedy, but also the site where the larger crime of the Cultural Revolution was committed, afflicting millions of individuals. The representation of the cruel dishes therefore carries significant implications that assist Chen with the investigation of Jia's crime, but also reveal to the reader the state crime of the Cultural Revolution:

His narration was interrupted by the appearance of White Cloud carrying four cold dishes of the house specials on a silver tray. "Fried sparrow tongues, wine-immersed goose feet, stewed ox eyes, ginger-steamed fish lips," she said. "They are made in accordance to a special menu left in the original mansion." Lu must have gone out of his way to prepare these "cruel dishes,"

and he spared no cost. A small dish of sparrow tongues could have cost the lives of hundreds of birds. The fish lips remained slightly red, transparent, as if still alive, gasping for air. "Incidentally, these dishes remind me of something about the story, something so cruel," Chen said. "Confucius says, 'A gentleman should stay away from killing and cooking in the kitchen.' No wonder." Jia appeared disturbed, which was the effect expected (*RMD* 265-66).

The dishes are presented in a series, which alludes to Jia's serial murders. The cruelty displayed in the preparation of the dishes mimics the nature of cold-blooded killing. To confront Jia with the details of his traumatic experience is nonetheless to subject him to a mental torture. As the disguised waitress White Cloud later demonstrates, the cooking procedure for yet another cruel dish, a turtle soup cooked by slowly increasing the temperature of the broth in which a live turtle is swimming, epitomizes the nature of the interrogation. The slow death of the turtle resembles the cruel storytelling strategy that Chen uses to break through Jia's psychological defence, and to breach his protective "shell".

In a larger sense, the cruelty of the dishes can also be regarded as a general metaphor for the cruelty existing in Chinese culture and history, and specifically the brutality demonstrated during the Cultural Revolution. Jia's family's doomed fate was a direct consequence of the Cultural Revolution. As a victim, the psychological distortion Jia has suffered makes him retaliate against society with further cruelty (serial killing). Therefore, the cruel dishes are used not just to intrigue the reader, but also to penetrate the deeper logic underpinning Chinese culture. Referring to the theoretical framework of Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle, it can be argued that the slow boiling of a living turtle, and especially the living monkey brain dish (*RMD* 136), demonstrate a cultural regression which sheds light on the compromises and setbacks of

Chinese culture on its way to modernity.⁹⁴ The nature/culture dichotomy in Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle points to an ambivalent stance towards the role of cooking in the progressive and regressive transitions from nature to culture. Cooking is believed to "bring about the cultural transformation of the raw" (Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw* 142). But the cruel cooking of the turtle and the uncooked monkey brain suggest a more complicated cultural logic that denotes a regression in the progress of Chinese civilization. What is worth noting is that the dishes described by Qiu here are not barbaric ancient dishes passed down from generations, but rather, they are renovated modern dishes based on elaborate understandings of nutrition and health. The *Bu* feast (*RMD* 132), in particular, follows the theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine with a modern dietetic belief that a combination of herbs and meat are essential to the health of the human body. Therefore, the evocation of these cruel dishes serves as a means for the author to reveal the regressive possibilities of Chinese culture, here clearly referring to the Cultural Revolution. Qiu's narrative representation of the theme of crime and his realistic depiction of Chinese culture and history can thus be regarded as an important exploration and investigation into the cultural logic marred by distorted leftist ideology during Mao's rule. In this light, his insistent pursuit of the theme of the Cultural Revolution can be understood as Qiu's own quest for explanations of the cruelty of Chinese culture.

⁹⁴ The culinary triangle is a concept which was firstly proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1966. It is a triad which involves a double opposition between nature/culture and elaborated/unelaborated. The three polarities are formed by the raw, the cooked and the rotten, which further involve three cooking methods: roasting, boiling and smoking. The triangle, however, is not only a tool for analysing food classifications but a theoretical device Lévi-Strauss uses in his analysis of myths in order to reveal more fundamental structural oppositions constituting human culture in general. For Lévi-Strauss, the triangle constitutes a method for the study of the border between nature and culture and of the "progressive" and the "regressive" movement across this border. See Lévi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle" 36-43.

Qiu's description of cuisine is closely connected with his representation of restaurants in Shanghai, which reflects the city's economic privatization, its soaring consumerism and the widening gap between rich and poor since the early 1990s. In *When Red is Black*, Detective Yu's wife, Peiqin, works in a state-run restaurant called the Four Seas Restaurant, where "employees were paid the same amount regardless of how long or how hard they worked" (*WRIB* 128). Yet, "in spite of its good location, the state-run restaurant was having a hard time [...] [and] suffered losses for months" (*RMD* 45). The decline of this state-run restaurant is revealed throughout the two novels. By contrast, Inspector Chen's friend, Lu, runs a modern restaurant called Moscow Suburb. Offering atmosphere, culture, history, and with "pictures and posters of Russian girls in old Shanghai" (*WRIB* 52-53) on the walls, the restaurant has become a "status-conscious" (*WRIB* 53), upmarket place that targets the middle class as its main consumers. The differences between these restaurants clearly indicate the growing consumerism in Shanghai. The increasing commodification of urban spaces in the city is a point that I have argued in the previous chapter. The Old Shanghai posters used by Lu in his restaurant further demonstrate the commodification of Old Shanghai history in the contemporary period. And the foreign name of the restaurant, Moscow Suburb, also evidences the Western heritage inherent in Shanghai culture.

In *When Red is Black*, Detective Yu brings his family to the Old Half Place where special *xiao* pork noodles are served (*WRIB* 220). It takes a considerable time for the narrator to explain the cooking procedures of *xiao* pork and how eating it has become a ritual for noodle lovers and regular customers of the restaurant. On his mission to find more clues for the case, Yu

overhears a conversation between two other eaters, one of whom receives “waiting-for-retirement pay”. “‘Eat and drink while you can. Life is short.’ The thin one raised his teacup, took a sip, and buried a piece of chicken deep under his noodles” (*WRIB* 221). As the narrator later explains, “for someone in the waiting-for-retirement program, with a monthly paycheck of around 200 Yuan, a bowl of plain noodles for 3 Yuan might be all he could afford” (*WRIB* 221). While the description indicates the economic level of the restaurant’s targeted consumers, it also reveals a changing consumption pattern that has emerged as a direct consequence of the city’s rampant consumerism and social transitions.

This impact of consumer culture is further accentuated in Inspector Chen’s experience with restaurants. Taking his secretary, White Cloud, to a high-class bar and restaurant called the Golden Time Rolling Backward on up-and-coming Hengshan Road (*WRIB* 197), Chen immediately distinguishes himself from Detective Yu in terms of their consumer power and income levels. With candle-light in its background, the bar is furnished with “a gramophone [...] an Underwood typewriter, [...] and an antique grand piano with ivory keys, all of which contributed to the period effect” (*WRIB* 197). Formerly “a private residence in the thirties” (*WRIB* 197), the bar attempts to recreate its original atmosphere in order to increase its commercial appeal:

Still, the whole scene was ingeniously designed. It was as if the life of the city had continued, uninterrupted, from the thirties. The years under Mao’s communist rule seemed to have been wiped out by the pink napkin in the hand of a young waitress, who wore a scarlet *qi* dress with high slits through which one could see flashes of her white thighs. [...] What surprised him was not the poor quality of the food they were served, but that people were content in spite of it. It seemed as if the atmosphere more than compensated for anything else. For the first time, he had a feeling that the New World project would work in Shanghai. Whether or not the customers here were exactly the middle-class ones in Gu’s mind, Chinese people wanted to find

new ways of enjoying life—"value-adding ways," the phrase he had read in the introduction to marketing (*WRIB* 198-99).

Here, history and culture are utilized as a means of increasing the restaurant's commercial appeal. According to the narrator's description, consumer culture is booming. Consumerism was an important component of Shanghai's urban culture in the 1930s and 40s. In *Shanghai Modern* (1999), Leo Ou-fan Lee points to "the hustle and bustle of high commerce" in the International Settlement of Shanghai through thorough research of its department stores, coffee houses, cinemas and other places of entertainments between 1930 and 1945 (18). The illusory continuity of history sensed by the narrator at this point is thus reminiscent of Shanghai's former consumer culture, which flourished once more in the 1990s. And this atmosphere of consumerism is so rampant that it seems almost capable of subverting the history of the Cultural Revolution. The seductive depiction of the waitress in a *qi* dress indicates lusts, desires and temptations, all of which are symbolic of the impact of capitalist consumer culture.

Notably, the recurrence of capitalism in the city echoes the implication of the novel's title: *When Red is Black*. Red, a symbol for communism, is replaced by black, a symbol for capitalism. A sense that history repeats itself is underlined. Shanghai had been seen as "a bastion of evil [...] [o]f wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism" (O. Lee 4) until it was transformed by the Communist Party into a city belonging to the Chinese people. But the scene described here obviously connotes a nonetheless familiar bourgeois lifestyle, as enjoyed by its citizens in the 1930s and the 1940s. Critically, that lifestyle was under attack during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, Shanghai's return to capitalism forcefully questions the validity of the country's former political

purge. In itself, it serves as a satire of the futility of history and political movements. Although the author's condemnation of the Cultural Revolution as a programme of dehumanization is explicit in the novel, it can be argued that he also shows a concern, through the narrative voice, for the subverting power of consumer culture that lulls people into forgetting histories too quickly. As is suggested by "the atmosphere more than compensated for anything else" (WRIB 199), consumer culture seems to function as a narcotic for the Shanghainese, encouraging them to forget the trauma of the Cultural Revolution completely, without further investigation or reflection. And the poor quality of the food as well as the restaurant's high prices serve as a strong contrast to the service offered at the Old Half Place, a state-run restaurant. This is a further indication of the degenerating moral standards caused by capitalist greed. By employing such a contrast between the two restaurants, the narrator also seems to suggest that the city's hasty return to consumer culture, of reverting to "black", is highly problematic and deserves further consideration.

On a different note, the fact that Inspector Chen can afford to invite White Cloud to a high-class bar and restaurant, replete with nostalgic design and decor, indicates that his level of income belongs to that of the city's rapidly-expanding middle class. As E. N. Anderson argues, "[f]ood marks social class" (125). This immediately distinguishes Chen from Detective Yu who is still struggling to improve his family's living conditions. Such a description further validates Inspector Chen's *flâneur*-like perspective as a modern, middle-class man who can afford to lead a bourgeois lifestyle. His contemplation of the city therefore generates a different reading of the city from that offered by Detective Yu. This returns to my previous point

concerning the bourgeois implication of Chen's social class. Furthermore, it serves as an example to illustrate the changing social classes and class mobility, and the widening gap between rich and poor in 1990s and 2000s Shanghai.

Conclusion

By embedding his exploration of the city's culture and history in the investigation of its present crimes, Qiu seeks explanations not only for the social divisions and conflicts that form the immediate cause of crimes in the present transitional phase of Shanghai, but also for the larger state crime of the Cultural Revolution that still exerts a certain impact on the contemporary life of Shanghai.

The crime genre facilitates Qiu's socio-political themes in several important ways. For instance, Qiu's characterization benefits from the genre's complex web of characters formed by a network of criminals, victims, suspects, witnesses and detectives. This allows him to demonstrate different social levels with conflicting interests and ideologies in 1990s Shanghai through a cast of characters. Both *When Red is Black* and *Red Mandarin Dress* offer fine examples of the way in which characterization assists Qiu in narrating a realistic picture of the city. However, such an exploration of characters comes at a price. For example, in *When Red is Black* the real culprit Bao does not emerge until very late in the novel and he is not mentioned anywhere in the earlier part of the story. This is because Qiu has relied heavily on many assumed suspects to reveal the changing social class in Shanghai before he introduces his real culprit. The culprit's sudden emergence on the police radar

is followed by a hasty revelation of his true identity; it therefore breaches the conventional pattern of the detective genre, leaving the reader little chance to indulge in attempting to deduce the identity of the criminal from a variety of known suspects prior to the author's final revelation.⁹⁵

On the other hand, Qiu's skilful deployment in conjoining the crime site and the restaurant, of turning them into TimeSpace nodes through which to associate the individual with wider issues of culture and history, further helps him to combine his different narrative themes. A complex and multi-dimensional depiction of Shanghai, with its recent history of dramatic urban change and the broader history of the Cultural Revolution, is thus presented to the reader. This skilful deployment of urban spaces is mainly achieved through the changing perspectives of Qiu's main characters. Frequently leading the investigation into seemingly unrelated cultural and historical excavations of the city, Inspector Chen's *flânerie* does shed light on the case from time to time. The complementary observations of urban geography afforded by Chen and Yu generate a deeper knowledge of the city, achieving what David Schmid describes as a means of "systematizing the city" ("Imagining Safe Urban Space" 247). However, while these culturally specific details make Qiu's novels a pleasant addition to the detective fiction genre and offer the reader a brand new narrative world they do, on the other hand, burden the narration with an overload of information. At times, the reader can find that Inspector Chen's personal hobbies, such as his love for poetry, have been given too much

⁹⁵ In a conventional pattern, the culprit(s) is/are often among other suspects that occur early in the novel. This allows the reader to test their intelligence to see whether they can discern the real criminal(s) before the author's revelation. This forms part of the appeal of a detective novel. A typical example would be Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934).

digressive attention before the thread of the central crime narrative is returned to in order to follow the investigation.

By knitting together past and present, and individual crime and state crime, Qiu's intricate deployment of characters and urban spaces allows his readers to undertake a symbolic expedition of cultural reinvestigation and reflection. His novels can therefore be regarded as calling for a re-engagement with the history of the Cultural Revolution at a time when it seems to have been quickly forgotten. Like his protagonist, Chen, Qiu is a detective endeavouring to unravel the mystery of the city's, as well as the country's, cultural history.

Chapter Four: Linda Fairstein's Gendered Representation of New York City in *Cold Hit* and *Likely to Die*

Introduction: Linda Fairstein and Female Detective Fiction in America

In this chapter, I use Linda Fairstein's *Likely to Die* (LTD) and *Cold Hit* (CH) as key comparative texts to read alongside Qiu Xiaolong's two novels discussed in the previous chapter. Like Qiu's novels, both of Fairstein's novels under discussion use New York City as an essential backdrop. Her solid knowledge of New York City, its history and culture enriches her representation of the city and urban crime. This makes her novels a good comparison with Qiu's. In these two novels in particular, Fairstein's deployment of crime sites (an art gallery in *Cold Hit* and a hospital in *Likely to Die*) deepens the author's socio-political message and complicates her interpretation of crime. The depiction of these places and their spatial, as well as temporal, implications enhances Fairstein's interpretation of individual crime and its connection with historical, institutional crime. This resonates strongly with Qiu's deployment of crime sites in his novels. At the same time, Fairstein's female protagonist allows a gendered perspective that is conducive to understanding New York City and the recent development of the crime genre in America. Although a female narrative voice naturally creates certain tension when compared with Qiu's male protagonists, such a difference in return prompts investigations of the social, cultural and ideological differences deeply rooted in the two cities.

This chapter investigates the ways in which Fairstein's representation of New York City, its urban space, history and culture, has complicated her representation of its crime. How do Fairstein's temporal and spatial perspectives assist her representation of the city and its crime? How does she relate individual crime to historical and institutional crime? How do her protagonists change and evolve in these two books? And how does her representation of Alexandra Cooper, the legal attorney, reveal the connection between gender and crime, and gender and crime fiction as a whole? Given all the coincidental similarities between Fairstein and Qiu, how does Fairstein's representation of the city and its crime differ from Qiu's representation?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Fairstein's literary career. Having worked for the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit in the New York County District Attorney's office for thirty years and been chief of the unit for twenty-five, Fairstein has also completed a total of thirteen novels in the Alexandra Cooper series which draws heavily on her own work experience, as well as one non-fiction book that deals with sex crimes. The Alexandra Cooper novels include *Final Jeopardy* (1994), *Likely to Die* (1997), *Cold Hit* (1999), *The Deadhouse* (2001), *The Bone Vault* (2003), *The Kills* (2004), *Entombed* (2005), *Death Dance* (2006), *Bad Blood* (2007), *Killer Heat* (2008), *Lethal Legacy* (2009), *Hell Gate* (2010), and *Silent Mercy* (2011). According to the *New York Times*, Cooper is "the nation's best-known prosecutor of sex crimes in a 30-year career of major cases, legislative reforms and best-selling books that explored the legal and emotional realities of rape" (McFadden). Perhaps because Fairstein's profession as a famous New York prosecutor has often overshadowed her literary career, she remains largely

neglected critically. It is only fairly recently that Fairstein has begun to receive increasing public attention. Her book, *Hell Gate* (2010), reached the *New York Times* bestseller list in March 2010 and the author has received the “2010 International Thriller Writers Silver Bullet Award” (Raffel).

Just as Messent has claimed, “the detective novel has come to be a generic house with many different rooms” (18). The female detective fiction has become an important sub-genre in the detective family. This is especially so with American detective fiction. For example, Kathleen Klein believes that the “current range of socially provoked innovations [with the detective genre] began with gender—most sharply delineated in the modern female private-eye novel [...]” (1). In her study of mysteries by contemporary female American authors, Kimberly Dilley believes that “mystery novels of women have provided a fertile venue for woman’s discussions about their own lives and their place in a society where gender prescribes behavior, expectations and limitations” (xix). In this sense, my discussions of Linda Fairstein’s Alexandra Cooper books become especially relevant. They offer a gendered perspective through which to interpret New York City in the contemporary period.

For contemporary crime fiction writers the city has always been a privileged setting. Many of Fairstein’s female peers choose particular cities as the backdrop for their crime novels. For example, Sara Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski novels are mostly based in Chicago; Patricia Cornwell’s Kay Scarpetta series in Richmond, Virginia; Susan Dunlap’s Jill Smith series in Berkeley, California, and Linda Barnes’s Carlotta Carlyle books in Boston. Prior to Fairstein, Lilian O’Donnell’s Norah Mulcahaney books and Marie Cirile’s Marie Cirile series have chosen New York City for their settings.

Fairstein chooses New York City as the setting for her novels mainly because of her work experience as a legal attorney in the New York County District Attorney's (DA) office. Such an experience gives her the raw material for her writing. However, unlike O'Donnell or Cirile, her perception of some of the places in the city, as well the various histories that these places reveal, allows her to reveal what David Goldberg calls "the geometries—the spatial categories through and in which the lived world is largely mapped, experienced, and disciplined" (qtd. in Kennedy 46). Fairstein's familiarity with New York's landscape allows her to use particular places skillfully and with great accuracy. Additionally, her knowledge of the city's history deepens her representation of these spatial categories, consolidating her social and political messages through the detective genre.

There are coincidental similarities between Fairstein and Qiu that merit a good comparison between them. To start with, both authors started their writing career on a part-time basis. Writing crime novels was their hobby and it was nurtured by their respective full-time professions. Their stories were frequently informed by their expertise in their respective fields. Qiu started writing while he was a full time academic teaching literature at Washington University, St. Louis. Writing crime novels allowed him to share his professional and personal observations of a changing Shanghai with the reader, against the background of a transitional China. Qiu's writing thus relies on a detailed knowledge of Shanghai's history and culture. This can be recognized by reading his *Years of Red Dust* (2008), a work of non-fiction that records Shanghai's *longtang* life. As a legal attorney in Manhattan's sex crimes unit Fairstein, on the other hand, shares her profession with her protagonist Alexandra Cooper. Coincidentally,

Fairstein also published a non-fiction work, *Violence: Our War Against Rape* (1993), prior to embarking on her fiction writing career. Her fiction is established on her professional knowledge of the criminal justice system, and on rape and sexual violence law in particular (Fairstein, interview by Dengler).

Secondly, both of their novels draw heavily on the culture, history and urban space of their respective cities. As I mentioned earlier, both authors have utilized specific locations in each city as crime sites, and their representations of these crime sites are complicated by the specific histories of the two cities. For example, Fairstein's representation of "Caxton Due", an art gallery in *Cold Hit*, reveals the historical crime inherited from the location. The hospital she represents in *Likely to Die*, "Mid-Manhattan Medical Center", on the other hand, shows the class division in American life. In this way, Fairstein's two books serve well as fictional texts that inform my analysis of the capitalist institution that defines America and American culture. Moreover, they are also good examples to compare with Qiu's two novels discussed in the previous chapter.

Last but not least, the time frameworks and social contexts of both novelists' books ensure a valid comparison too. Qiu's depiction of Shanghai is set in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This has been a time when challenges from an expanding population, growing gaps between rich and poor and socio-economic transformations have begun to take their toll on the city's traditional values. Meanwhile, Fairstein's two novels are set in the late 1990s, during which time New York City was experiencing a series of tightening police strategies to combat crime and clean the streets. The relatively acute issue of social crime in both cities during these respective time-periods allows

me to compare both authors, and their depictions of crimes and their cities respectively.

Urban Divisions and Criminal Transgressions

As in Qiu's Inspector Chen series, the way in which a city's history and culture play a key role in resolving its crime is also a theme employed by Fairstein in her Alexandra Cooper series. The author claims that one of the two things she aims to give the reader is "some aspect of New York's history".⁹⁶ Earlier in the series, New York, as she puts it: "became a character, richly developed as Alex, Mike and Mercer [Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace are Alex's police sidekicks]" (Fairstein, video).

This is particularly true with *Cold Hit* (1999), the third novel in the series. When Denise Caxton, the estranged wife of a renowned art dealer, is found raped and murdered in the Hudson River near the northern tip of Manhattan, Alex and her two police colleagues Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace are called onto the case. They soon find themselves caught in a complex web of shady fakes and forgeries in fine art dealing, which even reach as far back as the real-life unresolved art crimes of the Gardner Museum heist⁹⁷ and the Amber Room⁹⁸ theft. Worse than this, Denise's death is soon followed by a

⁹⁶ In her website video on *Hell Gate* (2010), Linda Fairstein claims that when she creates a new story in the Alexandra Cooper series, there are generally two things she is looking to give the reader. One is to look at the criminal justice system from an insider's point of view. The other is to explore a particular aspect of New York's history. See Fairstein, video.

⁹⁷ The Gardner Museum heist was the largest art theft in world history, taking place in Boston on March 18, 1990. Thieves stole thirteen pieces worth \$500 million, including Vermeer's "The Concert" from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. A reward of \$5 million is still offered for information leading to their return. See Murphy and Saltzman.

⁹⁸ Frequently described as the "Eighth Wonder of the World", the original Amber Room was a chamber decorated with 100,000 pieces of carved amber panelling covering 55 square metres. It was commissioned by Frederick I of Prussia in 1701, and was later presented to the Russian Czar, Peter the Great. It was looted during World War II by Nazi Germany and brought to

series of murders. As Alex and her colleagues explore Denise's life, a world of corruption, greed and scams in fine art transactions is unraveled.

In the story, Fairstein spares no effort to show the changing terrain of the criminal justice system throughout 1990s New York. New managerial strategies and forms of technologies were introduced into the legal system, upgrading the police service in the city. Fairstein gives a realistic representation of this:

Compstat had revolutionized the accountability of precinct commanders when it was introduced to the department in the early nineties. Several times a month, at seven o'clock in the morning, bosses from one of the city's geographic divisions were summoned to appear at One Police Plaza, to spend the next three hours being grilled by the chief of operations and two of his trusted henchmen. There was only one direction in which this mayor wanted the crime rate to move, and each man was called upon to answer for the evil that crossed his borderlines and played havoc with the numbers regularly released to the press by the Public Information deputy. [...] The new, automated fingerprint-matching system was solving scores of cases that used to require tedious hand searches (*CH* 24, 28).

Fairstein's description of the application of new managerial tactics (Compstat) and advanced technologies (the fingerprint-matching system) in NYPD highlights the 1990s as what Thomas A. Reppetto has called "a decade of rigorous enforcement by the police and prosecutors" (qtd. in Lueck) throughout Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration. The novels in the Alexandra Cooper series have traced this changing criminal geography of New York in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. As I have discussed in my Introduction, there is no consensus concerning Giuliani's contribution to the reduction of social crime, although New York City has become a much safer place in reality since the 1990s.

Königsberg. Knowledge of its whereabouts was lost in the chaos at the end of the war. See Shukman.

Fairstein's novels have represented the tightening grips of surveillance and control from the government in the 1980s and 1990s. According to her, the Compstat aims at lowering crime rates through encouraging different precincts to compete with one another. Fairstein also shows the changing attitude towards understanding and managing the city's safety thanks to an increasingly transparent public information system. The city is perceived as manageable, and the sense of urban safety measurable. However, while the managerial policing mechanism of Compstat has effectively extended competition, revealing its typically capitalist features, it serves more as an operational strategy to curb crime at a surface level rather than functioning as a means of addressing the fundamental social causes of crime. Throughout *Cold Hit*, a genuine authorial concern can be perceived for the deep-seated institutional causes for crime that remain unaffected under the improved legal and policing strategies represented by Fairstein. The "devil" (CH 18) and "the monsters who walk among us" (CH 22) are still at large.

Such an authorial concern is firstly shown when Fairstein tries to pinpoint the potential problem with Compstat by disclosing its working mechanism from an insider's point of view. Lunetta, NYPD's chief of operations, attempts to pressurize all precinct chiefs to keep the crime rate as low as possible since the "the mayor was just telling his supporters that murders in New York had dropped to their lowest numbers in more than a quarter of a century" and reminds them that the "point of all these exercises" is to let "everyone know how safe this city has become" (CH 36). Mike, however, refutes Lunetta in public:

Chapman made sure he muttered into the microphone as he picked up his notes and pocketed them. "I hate to burst

Hizzoner's bubble, but I gotta tell you his numbers are small comfort to the broad who's laid out in a refrigerator up at the morgue, waiting for her last physical" (*CH* 36).

The central debate here engages with the nature of policing work at a time when urban safety becomes an issue directly relevant to the city's financial and political interests. At issue here is whether policing should be a means to bring criminals to justice and to safeguard public security, or whether it should be used only as a means to serve some individual groups' political interests. Lunetta's purpose is apparently geared towards helping ensure the political power he supports for achieving the immediate financial goal of the city (earlier in the novel, he relates how tourists feel about crime in New York [*CH* 36]). Yet the consequences of such a utilitarian drive as part of a broader managerial strategy are that it subverts the moral core of police work and endangers its impartiality and justness. By sharply pointing out the fallacy of Lunetta's logic through Mike's voice in the above passage, Fairstein has disclosed the flaws of such a competitive administrative strategy in NYPD.

As the story develops, the geographical shifts between crime scenes, Alex's office in the Financial District, her apartment in the Upper East Side, Denise's home on Fifth Avenue and her gallery at Chelsea, reveal an economically divided Manhattan and New York, marked by disparate crime rates. Such a division is not only proof of disparate police resources but also explains the interconnectedness between crime and safety, poverty and wealth in New York City. This division is firstly shown through Lunetta, the chief of the department, whose eagerness to curb the crime rate leads him to act unprofessionally as he tries to enlighten Mike about Denis's case:

"You checking every area that borders the creek? May turn out to be a Bronx homicide after all, Chapman. The numbers get

tallied in the precinct where the crime occurred, you know.” “I don’t care where she dove in, Chief. *We* got her now.” Fat chance, Lunetta. Count it as an outer-borough murder so we keep the Manhattan numbers down? Nope, I’m with Chapman. She landed here, and no matter where she was killed, that gives us jurisdiction (*CH* 33-34 emphasis in original).

Lunetta’s suggestion here indicates a commonly held belief concerning the connection between crime and poverty. By allowing such a misconception to infringe upon his professional judgement, Lunetta’s reaction can be regarded as a response to the pressing need in the 1990s to formulate a statistically proven crime map that could translate a sense of urban safety to New York’s citizens and investors. Thus, ensuring “the numbers” look right becomes his primary goal, and a way to consolidate the synthetic concept of urban safety. Such a depiction reveals the fallacy of an administrative system that overemphasizes competition and efficiency to the extent that it subverts its original purpose of safeguarding justice. Furthermore, Lunetta’s act of holding one poor precinct responsible for another rich precinct’s crime suggests an intention to incriminate. By pointing out that the “numbers” are “tallied”, he suggests that the crime may come from the Bronx, an economically less advantageous part of New York City than Manhattan. Such an indication further showcases his eagerness to ensure the safety of the Manhattan area outweighs the impartiality required by his profession.

However, by making Denise a rich art-dealer in the upper echelons of Manhattan’s high society, Fairstein challenges such a simplistic connection between poverty and crime by diving deep into the history of wealth accumulation in New York and revealing the ways in which great wealth may be acquired through criminality. Such a perceptive understanding of wealth and crime is achieved mainly through the representation of Caxton Due, the art

gallery co-owned by Denise Caxton and her sadomasochistic friend Bryan Daughtry. Located in Chelsea, the gallery exhibits a series of ordinary things that are normally taken at face value, such as a piece of gray metal string, which Mike snorts at as being “useless” (*CH* 117). And, much to Alex’s surprise, a stretch of elevated Hi-Line railroad track is displayed in the museum as a piece of contemporary work of art:

The most striking surprise was that about three floors beneath where we stood, running from the north end to the south side of the airy atrium, was an actual stretch of railroad track. It was heavy, thick, covered with rust, and overgrown with weeds (*CH* 117).

The railroad track is part of the railway system that begins at Death Avenue, Hell’s Kitchen (112). It runs through West Midtown down to Chelsea. As a history lover, Mike complements Alex’s description of the place:

After the Civil War, when a large area of Manhattan’s West Side was thick with slaughterhouses, factories, lumberyards, and tenements, it housed one of the worst slums in the city. Cops who covered its beat called it Hell’s Kitchen, from Thirtieth Street north to Fifty-ninth Street, and from Eighth Avenue west to the Hudson River. “Freight trains rolled through here every day and night. The place was notorious—for its filth and for the dangerous gangs that controlled its everyday life. The kids who weren’t killed by disease or driven out by dust and noise were just as likely to be flattened by one of the trains” (*CH* 112).

The gallery’s incorporation of an obsolete stretch of rail track as its artistic exhibition makes it a unique time-space node in which to conjoin past and present, representation and reality. The fact that the rail track records the history of the area, as it has transformed from a community suffering from high crime and defined by poverty into a centre for fine art galleries associated with big money, complicates the connection between wealth and crime. Importantly, Caxton Due is also a major crime scene. It is the place where Alex discovers the motives of the culprit Frank Wrenley, confronts him single-handedly (*CH*

378), and the site from which she narrowly escapes. Therefore, Caxton Due becomes a site where crime is conducted, exposed, explored in historical depth and finally resolved. Alex's escape from a world of representations to a world of reality by following the rail track makes the gallery a significant metaphor in understanding how more affluent urban spaces may conceal their historical crimes. Such concealment, essentially, is achieved through the misrepresentation of reality via the means of art. The display of the "railroad track" as a work of art shows how a thing of commonality can be turned into a piece of art through certain interpretation or, more specifically, through its "catalogues raisonnés" (CH 135), the interpretations of artists and art commentators. This specialization within the art industry makes it subject to fake and forgery. The criminal act of producing fakes and forgeries in the art business, in turn, blurs the line between representation and reality, art and fakery, and therefore legality and criminality. It is through this form of crime that Alex reveals the deeper social cause of class divisions and social inequalities, a point which I will analyze further in this chapter.

In the plot, Frank Wrenley, art-collector and Denise's lover, has a scheme to sell the Gardner Museum theft to Denise, but struggles to persuade Denise to return a painting by the Flemish painter, Jan Vermeer, which he has entrusted to her safekeeping. Denise suggests splitting the reward with Frank by returning the paintings to the museum. Frank, instead, sends Anthony Bailor, a convicted rapist, to steal the painting. This narrative thread ends with Denise being raped and killed.

When these shady dealings in the world of fine art are disclosed, the reader is introduced to a gang of characters, mostly art-dealers who are

involved in crime in one way or another. Lowell Caxton's art family business is built on a century-long collection of stolen paintings and faked "catalogues raisonnés" (*CH* 135). The second victim, Omar Sheffield, qualifies himself to be Denise's assistant through blackmailing her by post whilst he is in jail. Bryan Daughtry is involved in the scandalous death of a young girl but evades identification and arrest by finding a scapegoat. Frank, the culprit, erases his criminal record before entering the art business with the help of his wealthy father.

The description of the world of the rich as being full of "lowlifes" (*CH* 328) accentuates how great wealth can be accumulated through crime. In reality, crime is always regarded as a short-cut to amass great wealth. And cities continue to be the hothouses that breed and nurture avaricious criminals. The sophisticated commercial and financial network in New York facilitates transactions involving dirty money and provides channels for these transactions to capitalize upon legal businesses. The "laundering" effect of New York City as an international financial centre is perhaps more evident in its many banks which have, in reality, reportedly been conducting illegal transactions. The Bank of New York (now renamed as the Bank of New York Mellon), for example, was accused by the Russian government of a money laundering scheme in the 1990s (Vasilyeva). In Lucy Komisar's article, she lists several renowned banks in New York City that have conducted money laundering, both in the past and the present. By disclosing the connection between crime and big money in New York, Fairstein reveals the capitalist logic that is often concealed by the city's urban landscape. The art gallery, in this instance, is used by the author to reveal the institutional causes of crime in the city.

Although the connection between capitalist greed and social crime is a point well established by sociologists, in this case Fairstein crystallizes shady dealings in the fine art world and deep-seated crime conducted by the rich through revealing the city's geographical divisions. These divisions are often concealed by an illusory sense of urban safety constructed on segregating the rich from the poor. Such a geographical segregation makes the poor easily incriminated. Through revealing such urban geographical divisions, Fairstein demonstrates that the apparently safe is not necessarily safe, and the apparently legal is not necessarily legal.

The central motif of the incrimination of the poor through geographical divisions is pushed further in *Likely to Die*. In this novel, the crime takes place in Mid-Manhattan Medical Center—a hospital deemed by Alex to be a “sanctuary, [a] place for healing the sick and wounded, comforting and easing the days of the terminally ill” (*LTD* 14). Gemma Dogen, head of neurosurgery at Mid-Manhattan Medical Center as well as a brain surgeon and professor for the prestigious hospital, is brutally murdered in her office. It also appears that she has been raped and left for dead. Alex soon finds herself confronted with a long list of potential suspects. William Dietrich, director of the hospital, has a relationship with Dogen but also disagrees with her as to how the neurosurgery unit should be run. Coleman Harper, whose application for a neurosurgical residency was rejected by the hospital committee led by Dogen, begins a new round of applications upon her rumoured leave. While the interviews with Dogen's colleagues generate little information about her personal life or potential enemies, the discovery of hundreds of homeless people who live in the tunnels and basements of the hospital and wander about at will, complicates

the case. The case is further complicated when a homeless man known as 'Pops' is found in the radiology department wearing surgical pants covered in human blood (*LTD* 135-36). However, he is soon eliminated from the suspect list. It is not until Alex's meeting with Geoffrey Dogen, the victim's ex-husband, that the political infightings within the hospital are unveiled. A vivid picture of Gemma Dogen, "a stickler for her principles" and "a lightning rod for trouble", begins to emerge (*LTD* 323).

The spatial deployment Fairstein exercises on the crime scene complements the central motif in *Cold Hit*. The crime scene, the medical school where Dogen's office is located, is well connected to other parts of the hospital buildings. It "was supposed to be a central headquarters in case of an atomic bomb blast in the city", but is full of "underpasses and mole holes" inhabited by "junkies with crack vials", "homeless people", "sad old men", "bag ladies", ex-inmates and lunatics (*LTD* 59). Uncannily, "half of them are dressed in doctor's scrubs or lab coats—obviously stolen from the floors. They've got trays with remains of patient's meals and empty bottles of prescription pills" (*LTD* 60).

The fact that Mid-Manhattan, a supposed sanctuary and intended war-time headquarters, holds such a subterranean world of desperate, homeless people who are presumed to be dangerous by many of the novel's characters teases out the irony of Fairstein's central motif. Fairstein's description of the underclass of people living in the hospital's underground tunnels is a fictional response to the legendary existence of the self-styled "Mole People" (Tierney) who were reportedly living in the tunnels and undergrounds of the New York rail system in the 1990s. Social research has revealed that the scale of the Mole

People living in these tunnels was far less extensive than described in Jennifer Toth's 1993 book, *The Mole People: Life in the Tunnels Beneath New York City*. But the Mole People did exist. Apart from various news reports that proved their existence, they are recorded in a more rigorous way in the documentary *Dark Days* (2000) by British documentary filmmaker Marc Singer, who captures the daily life of the community living in an abandoned section of New York City's underground railway system.⁹⁹ In this sense, Fairstein's work is highly dependent on the reader's knowledge of real-life events in New York City. It is only with such contextual information on the reader's part, that the interpretation of her socio-political message becomes clearer and more meaningful.

The description of this subterranean community has revealed the hidden layer of the hospital building, and the situation of New York's social division. The invisibility of the tunnel people alludes to the invisibility of the underclass of people who are excluded from mainstream society in New York City. Alex's colleague, Peterson, gives a vivid account of the underground people who can easily gain access to Mid-Manhattan:

"Wrong, Loo. Who's in them, not what. You see those skels out in the pens in the squad room? Those tunnels and rattraps are lived in by hundreds of homeless people. We walked through there this morning—you got sad old men just curled up along the wall asleep, you got junkies with crack vials littered all over the place, you got a girls' dorm with bag ladies who are dressed like they used to be Rockettes sitting around talking to themselves. In one stretch of roadway, I saw three guys I locked up in '94 during a drug sweep and I think the old fat man wearing a silver lamé jumpsuit who was urinating in a corner when we walked by might actually have been Elvis—I'm not sure" (*LTD* 59).

The hospital building metaphorically reveals that urban safety in Manhattan is

⁹⁹ For the news regarding the Mole People, see Pogrebin.

precariously balanced upon a hidden layer of danger, unpredictability and potential criminality. Fairstein's representation of the people in the underground tunnels, whom her colleagues assume to pose a threat to New York's safety, reveals a disintegrated city where poverty is problematically criminalized. Here, Fairstein's description of the socially excluded group of homeless people can be regarded as a direct criticism of the social consequences following dramatic policing strategies under Giuliani's administration.¹⁰⁰ Social crime in 1990s New York, by suggestion, is not eliminated but has merely been suppressed and hidden from the public eye.

This subterranean world also highlights a confrontation between agency and structure; two notions important to the sociological understanding of a society. In this case, the building epitomizes the city in general where institutionalization manifests in overt forms, becoming an impediment for individuals to fit in. The hospital and its staff members can be viewed as representing those citizens who have successfully achieved social integration while the people in the subterranean space symbolize those who fail to complete the social integration process. Therefore, they become undocumented people: outside Compstat's figures and hidden from the gaze of the city's tourists. Living on the fringe of society, their free access to the hospital becomes, metaphorically, a transgression of social boundaries, and is subsequently viewed as a threat by people working in Mid-Manhattan, and more generally, New York City.

The misconception of the relationship between poverty and crime is

¹⁰⁰ In his article, Stephen Metcalf quotes Giuliani's words in a documentary: "'Streets do not exist in civilized cities for the purpose of people sleeping there,' Giuliani says in term two, as he attempts to bulldoze Manhattan clear of the homeless, adding: 'Bedrooms are for sleeping.'" In his opinion, Giuliani's drastic policing strategies are not the reason for the fall of the crime rate in New York City during the 1990s. See Metcalf.

typified in the introduction of a homeless suspect, Pops, who lives in the underpasses beneath Mid-Manhattan and often wanders into the hospital during the night. This sense of incrimination is delivered through Fairstein's description of the scene in which two of Dogen's colleagues, Coleman Harper and John DuPre, discover Pops and report him to the police. Coleman Harper, who turns out to be the real culprit who kills Dogen out of desperation because Dogen's high professional standards hinder him from his own professional pursuit, fakes the murder scene to look like a random attack by a rapist. The act of faking the crime scene explicitly points to false incrimination, yet what makes the incrimination appear almost valid is Harper's logic that the people from the underclass are dangerous to the general public and potential criminals. John DuPre, on the other hand, tries his best to divert the investigators' attention away from him since he has faked all his professional credentials. Thus their discovery and report of Pops has symbolically revealed their intent to incriminate the poor though taking advantage of their disenfranchised social positions.

What makes the hospital a more interesting metaphor is the combination of its physical accessibility and social inaccessibility. Described as an easily accessed public place with nominal security Mid-Manhattan has, nevertheless, become a fortress for medical professionals.¹⁰¹ The description of the way in which Dogen maintains her lofty professional standards can be read as symbolic of the strict professional credentials needed for the medical profession, but also reveals an increasingly knowledge-concentrated division of

¹⁰¹ Early in the novel, one of Alex's colleagues uses the term "loose" to describe the security of the hospital. He claims that the security personnel at the entrance of Mid-Manhattan are "unlicensed, untrained and unqualified for any kind of serious caretaking." See Fairstein, *LTD* 58.

labour within New York City. This means that the entry into certain professions demands the accumulation of a combination of social resources (money, education, social networks, etc). As Fairstein repeatedly spells out, the universities that Dogen and her colleagues graduate from exemplify these social resources or, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, the "cultural capital" needed for an individual to achieve social mobility. As summarized by Randal Johnson in his introduction to Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production* (1983), "cultural capital" is "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts" (*The Field* 7). Bourdieu articulates the historical accumulation of certain social resources through this concept clearly. It is conducive to understanding the social divisions in Fairstein's novels since both crime sites represented by the author indicate a spatial and social division as a result of a disproportionate distribution of "cultural capital" in society. Fairstein's representation of the criminal acts of producing fakes and forgeries further unpacks the interpretation of Bourdieu's concept and reveals the institutional cause of the city's social divisions. Almost concurrently in *Likely to Die* and *Cold Hit*, Fairstein chooses to consider the criminal act of murder (with or without sexual attack) alongside the art of conmanship, placing equal emphasis on both categories of crime. Although sex crimes remain the focus of Fairstein's novels, the representation of the criminal act of producing fakes and forgeries in the art world, and in medical professional credentials is key to interpreting Fairstein's socio-political message.

In *Cold Hit*, the Caxton family's century-long production of fakes and

forgeries of “*catalogues raisonnés*” (135) undermines the system of determining the market value of artworks according to their academic credentials. Therefore, “a piece of gray string” in Caxton Due (117) can become a valuable artwork as long as the interpretation (*catalogues raisonnés*) meets the standard of the academy. The irony is that the Caxton family becomes a famous name in the fine art business after centuries of such transgressions. It is important here that the art gallery clearly indicates class distinctions, emphasising the fact that not everyone has the taste or knowledge to appreciate the work of art. Therefore, by using the art gallery as a site of criminal transgression Fairstein highlights class divisions which are easily overlooked because the art gallery conceals the domination of power by the dominant class. It is interesting that in formulating his key concept of “cultural capital”, Bourdieu makes particular reference to art galleries. He argues that “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code into which it is encoded” (*Distinction* 2). By articulating the presence of a certain system of social codes that insulates one class from another, Bourdieu has actually revealed the hidden class divisions entailed within the space of an art gallery. The gallery thus becomes a social agent through which power dominations are exercised.

In Jeremy Lane’s reading of Bourdieu, he pursues Bourdieu’s comments regarding art galleries through studying his *The Love of Art* (1969) and *Photography* (1996). He claims that Bourdieu’s theorisation of the aesthetic disposition, which is measured by the propensity to visit art galleries and hence appreciate fine art, “formed part of the bourgeois habitus, constituting a stock of ‘cultural capital’ which the dominant class could exploit to naturalise and

reproduce their dominant status” (Lane 52). Fairstein’s pursuit of the history of certain urban locations has crystallized the historical accumulation of “cultural capital”. The display of “a gray metal string”, therefore, can be interpreted as a process through which the dominant class exploits their “cultural capital”, in this instance the art gallery, to reproduce their dominant status. It is critical that the process of reproduction entails criminal acts which are overlooked. The century-long production of fakes and forgeries thus becomes legitimate in a social system where the dominant class has secured their “bourgeois habitus” and “constitute[ed] a stock of ‘cultural capital’”. It is within such a habitus fostered by capitalism that the criminality of the dominant class, that is the capitalists, can easily be blurred, overlooked and even legitimized.

Likewise, in *Likely to Die* Gemma Dogen’s colleague, John DuPre, fakes all his professional records by stealing the identity of a renowned medical professor. Surprisingly, he successfully maintains his fake identity for a long time as “all the patients raved about his bedside manners” and “when they investigated him for that offense in the early eighties, all the local physicians were shocked” (358). By transgressing professional boundaries, such fakeries break through those social divisions that are caused by a disproportionate allocation of cultural capital. Therefore, crime becomes a way of sidestepping professional hurdles and making an easy entry into a medical career. Similarly, as an attempt to break through the high standards that impede him from his professional goal, Coleman Harper’s murder of Gemma Dogen furthers the message that criminal transgressions offer a means to infiltrate professional institutions and cross social boundaries.

Although the nature of the fine art business is entirely different from the

medical profession, both demand high professional credentials that pose a challenge to those who want to enter each respective industry, revealing the increasing level of New York's "cultural capital" that serves to insulate certain groups of individuals from others. Conflicts between individuals and the structural demands of society thus become ever more confrontational. The debate over agent-structure in sociology points to a duality within the two concepts as a result of their mutual impact on each other. For functionalists such as Émile Durkheim, structure is essentially stabilising and secures the very existence of society. Theorists such as Karl Marx, by contrast, emphasizes that the social structure can act to the detriment of the majority of individuals in a society. In both these instances "structure" refers to the material and cultural system of a society while the agent, in this context, refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices (qtd. in Giddens 36). Although the two are mutually dependent, the tension between them is almost irreconcilable. This holds true in particular for a more developed urban society, such as New York—a city that is characterised by fierce competition among its inhabitants. In such a late capitalist city, urban individuals often find themselves in a more direct confrontation with the structural demands of society. They are more likely to be victimized by these demands. Crime has thus become a means to break through such structural boundaries in order to achieve a shortcut into assimilating within the social system, entry into which demands an increasing number of social resources.

In this light, the physical transgression enacted by homeless people living in the subterranean world and entry into a fortress-like world of professionals, the Mid-Manhattan, is more than ironic. It is key to note here

that such a social division is perhaps more typical in New York City where intensified social competition leads to more demanding professional and industrial standards since the 1980s. Statistics show that there is a “shift in dependence from manufacturing to services, and particularly to finance [...] New York's economy not only grew during the eighties but also underwent a restructuring” (“NY-Economy”). This is further demonstrated in a study by Fitch, who claims that “[n]o U.S. city has changed its industrial structure as dramatically as New York” (4). According to Fitch, the higher unemployment rate of the city in the 1990s (in comparison with the national average) is largely a result of such industrial restructuring. He further points out that “contrary to both the aims and claims of planning elites, there has been no real movement from manufacturing into ‘higher information industries’” (5-6). In response to these industrial changes, social mobility in New York City “slowed between the 1970’s and 1980’s—and then slowed again between the 1980’s and 1990’s” (Leonhardt). Fitch further stresses the alarming gaps that have emerged between different professionals in his analysis of New York’s economy in the 1990s, stating that “the single most striking feature of the entire FIRE-driven collapse of the 1990s, however, is how well income earned by the financial sector has held up in the last two years despite rapid shrinkage in overall employment, consumption, jobs, and income” (22).¹⁰² This analysis helps to explain the social context of the criminal transgressions represented in Fairstein’s book. The social division revealed by the disparate employment status of the medical professionals and the homeless, as well as the vast income gaps between these two social groups, informs us of the deep social fissures

¹⁰² FIRE represents the initials for “finance, insurance and real estate.” See Fitch 20.

that underpin New York City. Therefore, the spatial division between the medical professionals (working above the ground) and the homeless (living underground) metaphorically informs their class distinctions.

Hence, the physical visibility of homeless people within the hospital and the invisibility of their social identities enhance the sense of social divisions accentuated in *Cold Hit*. What differentiates the spatial organizations of these two novels is that the criminal geography in *Cold Hit* reveals a horizontal topography of such social and class divisions, while in *Likely to Die* the depiction of Mid-Manhattan enriches this picture with an almost Dante-esque view of the city, divided according to a vertical stratification. The stretch of railway in Caxton Due that connects past and present, and reality and representation, symbolically reveals the rich/poor division in a linear, two-dimensional way. In comparison, the depiction of Mid-Manhattan's subterranean community enriches the symbolic meaning of the building, making the rich/poor division three-dimensional.

Fairstein's depiction of Caxton Due and Mid-Manhattan as seen through the lens of a historical perspective, offers a conscious understanding of the histories that inform their spatial layouts. It thus echoes the claims of David Harvey in his study of geography:

The present condition of geography and proposals for its transformation must be firmly grounded in an understanding of history. The roles and functions of geographical knowledge, together with the structures of that knowledge, have changed over time in relation to, and in response to, shifting societal configurations and needs (*Space* 108).

Although Harvey's claim points to a more general and extensive sense of geography, it can successfully be applied here to anchor the interpretation of specific urban locations. The complication that history exerts on the social

meaning of spaces is worthy of further analysis in order to understand social realities and historical truths. It is evident that historical truths are easily subject to misinterpretation and can easily be distorted to serve the interests of particular ruling classes. The sense of sublimity established in the Caxton Due art gallery and the sanctuaried atmosphere of Mid-Manhattan thus hides the historical realities of class division and the institutional crimes committed as a result of what Harvey calls the “shifting societal configurations and needs” of these locations. Whilst different layers of history have coexisted throughout time, they are represented within these two locations only in terms of the current spatial organizations. It is this temporal specificity of a spatial setting that makes it easy to hide other layers of historical truths from people. Therefore, Caxton Due serves to conceal the Caxton family’s criminal activities which have led to their success in the art business and, more remotely, the history of the location as a former site of poverty and crime in New York City. By comparison, Mid-Manhattan hides a potentially dangerous subterranean community, which contradicts the building’s original purpose as a sanctuary and residential home. These narrative spaces thus betray those other temporalities and various historical realities that are non-contemporaneous through the establishment of societal configurations which, in turn, blur the line between legality and illegality across the time.

Georg Simmel wrote that “[p]eople seldom appreciate how marvellously the extensity of space accommodates the intensity of sociological relationships” (141). Fairstein’s exploration of the historical depth of these urban locations has led us to consider complicated sociological relationships that are easily overlooked. History, as I have argued earlier, can be twisted by

space and suppressed by a building that indicates only one layer of social reality and works to conceal other layers of history. This is a point that is also made by Stevenson in her study of modern cities. She claims that “cities are comprised of multiple histories and a myriad of coexisting and competing presents” (Stevenson 54). Such a richly stratified layer of histories coexists, first and foremost, in the form of particular urban buildings, landscapes or places such as Caxton Due and Mid-Manhattan. I would argue here that divisions in urban space have become what Bourdieu refers to as one of the symbolic “instruments of domination”, a concept he formulates to suggest those power relations in society that are established through hierarchical structures imposed by the dominant class. Bourdieu defines his concept of “symbolic power” as “a power of constructing reality, and one which tends to establish a *gnoseological* order: the immediate meaning of the world” (*Language* 166 emphasis in original). According to Bourdieu, the formation of a “symbolic power” depends on ““a homogeneous conception of time, space, number and cause, one which makes it possible for different intellects to reach agreement”” (*Language* 166). Divisions in urban space thus become a means through which to impose certain power by the dominant class upon the poor. This makes the spatial category of the city a central instrument in the exercise of power dominations. In this sense, Fairstein’s description of the high professional demands exacted by the art gallery and the hospital reveals that these spatial sites have become what Bourdieu calls “homogeneous conception” that divides social groups and insulates them from one another.

Whilst the temporality of different historical realities can be pinpointed by archeology, space is liable to multiple interpretations and is continually

being reconfigured and re-modified. Space therefore accommodates multiple subjective truths that represent different values, ideologies and moral contexts. In functioning as an anchor to stabilize specific moments in history, space is in a constant competition with time to signify a particular meaning that will dominate and override certain historical facts, constructing a more stable and singular form of historical reality. Stevenson argues that:

spatial practices create a myriad of narrative maps which, [...] are central to the process of transforming cartographic space into places of meaning and memory. As a result, within a single urban landscape, a multiplicity of places will exist that have been defined through use, imagination and cultural practice. It also points to the likelihood that such a confusion of meaning and references can lead to fixation on surfaces at the expense of depth and 'true' experience (55).

Stevenson's analysis further demonstrates that urban space has an embedded interconnectedness with time. The concepts of time (in the form of history) and space (in the form of places and locations) are often integrated to represent one fixed historical reality. The "depth and 'true' experience" that Stevenson refers to is thus easily hidden by the current social configuration of space. Therefore, employing a temporal perspective through which to view space becomes crucially important for disclosing other layers of historical truths. In their fixed spatial functions as an art gallery and a hospital respectively, crime sites such as Caxton Due and Mid-Manhattan can only carry one singular historical meaning unless a historical perspective is introduced to explore the previous histories of these two sites. But in utilizing a historical dimension, a more complicated set of sociological relationships is revealed that offers the reader enlightenment pertaining to the current crimes, their relations to historical and institutional crimes, and to the city in general.

Interestingly, Fairstein's strategy of exploring those multiple historical

truths contained within specific urban places is an approach also employed by Qiu Xiaolong. His representation of restaurants, typically in *Red Mandarin Dress*, delineates the state crimes that must assume responsibility for Shanghai's current wave of individual crimes. Through such a spatio-temporal perspective, both authors disclose the connection between historical crimes and crimes occurring within the present, as well as between history and the city more generally. This perspective also reveals the fact that social divisions can easily be hidden by the use of certain geographical configurations both in New York and Shanghai. Additionally, such a perspective helps Fairstein and Qiu to reveal the different social and historical causes of crime in their respective cities. These causes are put into perspective by the descriptions of the different phases of urbanization in the two cities.

Fairstein's Manhattan apparently has a more advanced economic landscape than Qiu's Shanghai. Overt physical geographical gaps indicating economic inequalities are a thing of the past, or at least they appear at the very fringe of the city which is beyond the author's knowledge or concern. Fairstein seemingly privileges the description of Compstat and the new sex assault laws that have been ratified in Manhattan. They demonstrate the fine-tuning of New York's government policies, legislative improvements and technological advancements which are applied to optimize the safety of the city. But it is worth mentioning that Manhattan is perhaps the only area in New York City that has greatly benefited from Giuliani's zero-tolerance policy in reality.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ The Zero-tolerance policy is a form of policing strategy that was firstly introduced to New York City under its mayor Rudolph Giuliani. This method applied additional law-enforcement resources to areas of the city where certain form of crime such as mugging, theft, drug-dealing or prostitution was endemic. It was later widely used by other parts of North America, Britain and Australia. By imposing strict law enforcement to curb petty crimes, the zero-tolerance policy aimed at eliminating undesirable social conducts before they turned into more serious

Fairstein's representation of the false incrimination of the poor reveals a tension between Manhattan and the outer boroughs of New York. It demonstrates that the gap between the rich and the poor is often masked by Manhattan's seemingly egalitarian landscape. However, Fairstein's representation of crime as understood through a historical lens in both her novels helps to explore the social divisions that are concealed by the seemingly equal urban landscape. Her exploration of the interrelationship between historical and institutional crime becomes a way to question the morality of big money, the legitimacy of wealth accumulation and the problematic aspects of police policies.

By comparison, Qiu's depiction of Shanghai mirrors the city's drastic transition from a planned to a market economy. Such a depiction is evidenced by his description of a dramatically changing urban landscape in its physical form. According to Qiu, the city's massive scale of building and expansion are a key concern for the government. Few efforts have been made to accommodate its citizens to such changes. Consequently, confusion and conflicts erupt, jeopardizing the city's security. Under these circumstances, crime becomes a choice made by desperate individuals in order to internalize drastic social changes. At the same time, Qiu cleverly associates contemporary individual crimes with historical and state crimes through his themes and characters. In this way, he delivers his pivotal message about the connection between state crime and individual crime. For Qiu, the historical baggage that the city (and the country) has inherited from the Cultural Revolution only further complicates the impact of its current, drastic social changes. In

social crimes. There are, however, criticisms of the zero-tolerance policy and its alleged contribution to the fall of crime rate in New York City. See Bratton 1-28.

establishing such a connection, Qiu's novel has a clear political agenda in critiquing the government and suggesting that it must be held responsible for the current state of social crime.

In general, Qiu's novels highlight the sense of disruption within the country's political policies. For Qiu, the inconsistency of governmental ideologies and policies are responsible for its current social divisions and rise in crime. Similarly, Fairstein's novels also entail a clear political agenda. Her depiction of Lunetta and of the NYPD reveals the fallacy of certain governmental strategies. In addition, her exploration of historical, institutional crime also reveals the fallacy of the capitalist system and implies that the dominant capitalist class must share the blame for inherited social divisions and social crime. Such an exploration of the historical realities through certain urban spaces becomes a strategy shared by Fairstein and Qiu to suggest the interconnectedness between institutional crime, state crime and individual crime. It enhances the interpretation not only of the immediate causes of criminal behaviour as depicted by the authors, but also of the political and institutional causes behind these crimes.

When we return to Fairstein's novels, we find that the author problematises the understanding of urban safety in choosing an unlikely victim as her criminal and a place of care and nurture as the crime scene. In this way, Fairstein crystallizes the potential criminality that is often concealed by New York's high society. Through unpacking the institutional crime that remains at work behind these current individuals crimes, Fairstein's novels reveal the superficiality of the policing strategies in 1990s New York. They also provide the requisite perspective through which the reader can reflect upon the

bureaucratic tendencies towards incriminating the poor in New York City. More importantly, Fairstein's novels provide a refreshing approach to understanding sex crimes, too. There is an embedded didactic purpose in her recurring theme of representing sex crimes. Fairstein's representation of sex crimes reaffirms the message that Manhattan's relatively lower crime rate is established by suppressing crimes or pushing them into the city's outer boroughs. While such a subverted notion of urban safety informs the reader of the volatile nature of crime and safety in New York, it also reveals the vulnerability and insecurity at the heart of the female protagonist, Alexandra Cooper.

Sex Crimes: Alexandra Cooper, the Female Investigator and Female Victims

In her Alexandra Cooper series Linda Fairstein has created a female legal prosecutor who, like her police sidekicks, plays an important part in criminal investigations. She visits crime scenes, interviews suspects and makes crucial discoveries that lead to the apprehension of the culprit. As an attorney, Alex provides an insider's view regarding law enforcement and crime. This view is complemented by her constant reflections on the legal system in the NYPD and her thoughts on the city's historical crimes. Alex's references to past crimes in association with the current crime sites she visits often throw light on the historical and geographical transformations of New York City. Her observations allow readers to look beyond current crimes and see into the implications of historical, institutional crimes against American society.

Fairstein once confessed that her character Alexandra Cooper is influenced by Patricia Cornwell's Dr. Kay Scarpetta. She claimed in an interview that she was "riveted" by Patricia Cornwell's work, which has "a strong woman protagonist in a non-traditional role" (Fairstein, interview by Stahl). She has also said in an interview that "[a]fter reading Patricia Cornwell's novels about medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, I realized I wanted to do the same thing for my subsection of the law" (Fairstein, interview by Cantor). Specializing in sex crimes and getting directly involved in the investigation of criminal cases, Fairstein's choice of Alexandra Cooper as her protagonist allows her to explore the life of an independent professional woman in New York City. Alex's educational background, enterprise and passion for work prove that, like her male colleagues, she is equally competent at her job.

Besides using Alex as a means to transfer her knowledge of the law to the reader, Fairstein's choice of a woman investigator entails an important message concerning the changing role of women in New York City. Alex's concern for historical realities, her quest for justice and engagement with a wider society, makes her an important development of the female detective protagonist in this subgenre. Importantly, Alex can think beyond her professional role and examine the deeper institutional cause of social crime. Her insight into the history of New York proves her to be a much more complicated and mature investigator character than, for instance, V. I. Warshawski or Scarpetta, in the sense that she serves as an agent not only to deliver Fairstein's feminist claims but also her political assertions. This is important because female detective characters are often not expected by most

critics to function as anything more serious than a mouthpiece to voice feminist claims. With the geographical division of New York unfolding through Alex's investigation, Fairstein has actually forged a female investigator's voice that is serious and thought-provoking, leading the reader to investigate the social, historical and institutional causes behind current crimes.

However, Alex has her limitations too. She still falls into the stereotype of the female detective summarized by Bethe Schoenfeld as "predominantly [a] middle-class wom[an] in a middle-class fictional stratum" (838). The privileges of her upper middle-class family background, her financial independence and her ethnic identity as a white woman, become the personal attributes that offer Alex a better perspective through which to observe American society, but also serve to prevent her from representing a wider group of American women, some of whom are still easily victimized by a predominantly patriarchal society. Nevertheless, such limitations on Alex's part have been partially compensated for through the representation of various female victims in both novels. By using a set of characters that includes a female investigator and various female victims from different social backgrounds, Fairstein has managed to conduct a thorough examination of gender relations in American society while articulating her feminist and political ideals.

In their investigation of female detective fiction in America, Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones believe that contemporary female detective fiction has its "feminist ends" (4). They investigate novels by Sara Paretsky, Marcia Muller, Linda Barnes, Liza Cody and Sue Grafton and argue that female detective writers use "an established popular formula in order to investigate not just a particular crime but the more general offenses in which the patriarchal

power structure of contemporary society itself is potentially incriminated” (4). On a certain level, Alexandra Cooper can be regarded as Fairstein’s surrogate in terms of her outlook and her professional activities. She shares the author’s profession and upholds her feminist ideals and political thoughts. However, in order to evaluate how successfully Fairstein has expressed her feminist assertions through Alex, it might be useful to use Maureen Reddy’s methodology for judging the subgenre. She claims:

One useful way to counteract the marginalization of women’s writing in any genre is to redefine the center; in this case, I would argue for a broad definition of crime fiction, using the term as an inclusive one covering all those works of fiction in which a central interest lies in the examinations of events, often but not always criminal, that are partly concealed at the beginning of the story (5).

Here, Reddy proposes to examine not only the female protagonist’s performance at work, but also her private life as a means with which to judge the intensity of claims made by feminist writers. She believes that a woman protagonist’s methods of examining not only the criminal, but also the events and happenings surrounding the crime, can often reveal the feminist ideals intended by the author.

In *Likely to Die*, Alex is depicted as a single woman in her early thirties. Financially independent, her lifestyle epitomizes that of a successful, middle-class, professional woman with a privileged family background and living in New York City. Compared with her NYPD sidekicks Mike, who lives in “a tiny fifth-floor walk-up studio apartment he called ‘the coffin’” and Mercer, who comes from a working class family and has divorced twice (*LTD* 79), Alex “live[s] on the twentieth floor of a high-rise building with two doormen, and pay[s] dearly for a great sense of security once inside” (*CH* 220). Such a

comparison reveals the financial privilege Alex enjoys in comparison with her colleagues. Apart from that, she owns another home in Martha's Vineyard and has "a monthly parking spot at the airport" (*CH* 222) in the island. The image of a financially superior woman is thus revealed. The financial privilege enjoyed by Alex gives an early indication of women's improved financial status in New York. Fairstein enhances this message by making Alex a single woman, thus liberating her from conventional responsibilities that restrict women: family and children. Therefore the freedom Alex enjoys symbolizes the liberty that a white, highly-educated professional woman can enjoy in New York City. To liberate her female protagonist from domestic triviality signals, first and foremost, Fairstein's break with the stereotypical images of women detective characters from her contemporary writers. By affording Alex with a privileged financial background, the author offers her the freedom and liberty to think and behave in ways that would not be possible for a traditional woman detective character who conforms to a family-bound and financially-burdened social position within a consumer society such as New York City.

According to Fairstein, Alex is hardly interested in, and has little time for, domesticity. She rarely cooks at home. She eats most of her meals in the restaurants near her home or her work place. She is often found working overtime in her office or discussing cases with her colleagues late into the night in various restaurants or bars. In one instance, Mike and Mercer suggest having a home-cooked meal at Alex's place:

Babson was off down the staircase before the elevator doors opened to take us to the lobby. It was after five when we walked out of the hospital. "Where to?" "What would you think of a nice, home-cooked meal for a change?" Mercer asked. "I'm out guys." "No, no. Let's pick up something from the supermarket. Mike and I'll cook it. All you have to do is load the dishes in the

dishwasher.” “Deal” (*LTD* 226).

Domestic cooking is traditionally associated with stereotypical images of women and femininity. By divorcing Alex from this traditional domestic skill and imparting it to her male colleagues, Mike and Mercer, the author degenders Alex and exchanges the gender roles between Alex and her two male colleagues. This delivers a provocative feminist message to suggest the transformational role of women working as professionals instead of housewives in New York City. The conventional role of a woman has been totally subverted here through describing Alex’s basic lack of cooking skills. Although cooking has increasingly become a skill mastered by both men and women in real life, Fairstein’s subversion of traditional gender roles here informs Alex’s gender identity in her professional life. She is treated as equal to, if not more masculine than, her male colleagues. This side of Alex is important to the story and by degendering Alex in her professional life Fairstein has established Alex’s authority and competence as a criminal investigator, in comparison to her male partners.

In addition to the detective protagonist, many of the female characters in *Cold Hit* and *Likely to Die* are described as financially more privileged and professionally more successful than their male counterparts. Gemma Dogen, for instance, is a renowned neurosurgeon who sends her boyfriend William Dietrich a Delage (antique car) that he can’t afford (*LTD* 249). Meanwhile, Denise Caxton in *Cold Hit* owns an art-gallery with Bryan Daughtry and enjoys as much freedom in terms of earning and spending money as well as enjoying sex as her dissipated husband. These characters thus emphasize the transformational role of women in New York City that Fairstein intends to

highlight. They also strongly resonate with Candace Bushnell's liberated female characters. The financial privileges enjoyed by such professional female characters as Alex, Gemma, and Denise in Fairstein's novels, and Samantha and Carrie in Bushnell's novels, reveal the profile of highly-educated white professional women in New York City. They enjoy the freedom and liberty endorsed by their professions, their ethnic identities and the city. Although they are still vexed by the difficulties entailed in finding ideal husbands from time to time, these privileges allow them to enjoy a greater degree of choice in their personal lives than ever before.

While the financial independence that women are able to enjoy is an important index in revealing the social advancement of American society since the 1970s in general, this is perhaps more typical with women living and working in American cities and is particularly relevant to the context of New York. According to Andrew Beveridge, Manhattan women "are much more likely to be single, earn more money, and have more education than women living in the rest of the United States". He supports this claim by quoting the statistics from the 2005 Census: "[a]bout 45 percent of New York City women ages 25 to 64 ever married. In Manhattan, it's just 37 percent" Through the character of Alex, however, Fairstein captures the liberty enjoyed by Manhattan women in a significantly different manner to the characterization employed by Bushnell in the development of her female characters. In Bushnell's novel, the female protagonists still regard finding a rich husband as their priority in life while Fairstein's female characters regard career development as more important. The liberty and independence demonstrated by Alex are transformed into full devotion to her work. And only when there is

any time left over after her work has been completed does Alex choose to develop serious romantic relationships with men. Besides this, Bushnell's female characters use their sex as an important leverage to achieve certain professional ends (in a similar manner to the models portrayed in Bushnell's text), while Fairstein's female characters are degendered and their gender identities become less important to their professional achievements. Compared with Bushnell's female characters, Alex demonstrates little fetishism towards consumerism although she equally enjoys shopping in her limited leisure time.¹⁰⁴ While this is perhaps a reflection of Fairstein's own principles and lifestyle, it also informs the reader of a financially and emotionally more independent image of women in New York. Therefore, it can be argued that Fairstein has upheld a more provocative feminist message than Bushnell through her construction of career-oriented female characters.

A further comparison between Alex and Coco in Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* and *Marrying Buddha* will allow us to see the intensity of these authors' feminist assertions more clearly. Coco's exploration of her own sexuality and her reliance upon different men to assert her own identity only prove that she is a relatively conventional character when compared with Alex, and even with some of Bushnell's characters. Coco's reliance on men reveals that the feudalistic patriarchal tradition still plays a dominant role in Chinese society in general. Although Wei Hui has intended to use Coco as a means to challenge patriarchal power in China, as I have argued in Chapter Two, her depiction of Coco as a physically and emotionally dependent woman still indicates the author's lack of confidence in her allegedly feminist claims. And her

¹⁰⁴ Chapter 15 of *Likely to Die* gives a vivid description of how Alex spends her weekend having her hair cut, doing her laundry, shopping, receiving a manicure in a nail shop and spending time with Drew Renaud, her boyfriend. See Fairstein, *LTD* 185-202.

exploration of female sexual freedom as a way to challenge patriarchal traditions is compromised by the tendency to commodify female sexuality through literature.

In opposition to Wei Hui, Fairstein's accentuation of Alex's professional independence and competence through a process of narrative degendering is vital to conveying the author's provocative feminist assertions. It is worth mentioning that Fairstein herself has headed America's first sex crime unit for twenty-five years. Half of her novels were published before she retired from her post. Now a full time writer, she serves on the board of *Safe Horizon*, the country's largest victim advocacy organization, and is heavily involved in the national organization *Literacy Partners*. She is also on the board of *God's Love We Deliver*, a charity that feeds terminally ill New Yorkers. Such energy and passion for work is shared by her character Alex, and both have little time to worry about the issues that concern most of the characters in *Sex and the City* or preoccupy Coco in *Shanghai Baby*. Therefore, the female characters developed by these three authors have revealed different levels of feminist engagement. Alex's independence at work becomes a useful index to show the forceful feminist assertions made by Fairstein. Bushnell's characters, on the other hand, reveal the compromises made by the author in terms of her feminist assertions through their use and abuse of their gender roles at work. Meanwhile, Coco still appears to be relatively conventional in this light because of her emotional and physical dependence on men.

Crucially, under careful textual examination the independence and liberty enjoyed by Alex becomes manifestly facilitated by the urban environment she inhabits. Alex does not need to cook because she can afford to

eat in the restaurants around her home and work place. Living at the epicentre of consumerism that is New York's Manhattan, Alex's financial independence and the city's amenities free her from domestic chores so that her gender no longer functions as a weakness or an impediment to her professional pursuits. Nor has Alex time to cook. Her life in New York City is accentuated by a full professional commitment that takes up most of her time and leaves her little room to develop her personal life. Her weekday mornings are frequently begun with urgent calls from Mike or Mercer at uncomfortably early hours (*LTD* 9, 267). She is often trapped in her professional role as a prosecutor and struggles to keep a balance between her degendered professional role and her feminine sense of self.

For example, knowing that she has little chance to get acquainted with men outside her job, Alex's friend Joan kindly introduces her to the widower Drew Renaud at a Saturday-night dinner party, advising her: "Alex, don't be a sex crimes prosecutor tonight, will you please? Be a girl" (*LTD* 193). The fact that Alex needs to be reminded to step outside of her professional role and behave like a "girl" implies the profound impact of her lifestyle and the urban environment upon Alex. A subtle implication can be perceived here. Her lifestyle is a result of her demanding job and the pressures of living in New York City. Evidently, Alex's financial privilege is significantly derived from her professional independence, which is nurtured and encouraged by the city milieu. As Fairstein describes it, whilst city life contains all the mechanisms to facilitate an individual's professional development, it also places men and women on an equal footing in terms of intense social competition. Moreover, Fairstein's New York City imposes a degendering functionality on individuals

that diminishes the role of gender in social competitions yet also, by implication, implicitly supports feminist ideals and claims.

Such a representation of socially successful women in New York City extends Munt's comments regarding Sara Paretsky's professional detective V. I. Warshawski who, she argues, "vocalize[s] the liberal feminist idea of the liberated woman, who is equal to the male role but still retains femininity—strong *within* her gender role"(33). In Alexandra Cooper's case, this feminist ideal is expressed in even more overt forms. Women are portrayed not only as being equal to men but often exceed men and enjoy more liberty in terms of their financial security and career advancement.

When Maureen Reddy examines Lillian O'Donnell's numerous novels with her redefined "center" (5), she argues that the private life of O'Donnell's protagonist, the NYPD policewoman Norah Mulcahane "mirrors her professional life, as both are lived under male domination" and therefore O'Donnell's "plots and themes tend to be deeply anti-feminist, despite superficial nods in the direction of feminism" (73-74). However, unlike the almost sexually aggressive character of V. I. Warshawski that Paretsky develops, or an unbelievably hard-boiled female police character such as O'Donnell's Norah Mulcahane—who, on the other hand, successfully balances adopting a baby with holding down a highly demanding job —Alex displays a more controlled and balanced feminine profile. She is deeply conscious of the conflict between her work and her personal life. She tries her best to achieve a balance between the two by making time for her friend's dinner party and increasing her social networking. Her reiteration of her love for her late fiancé who dies on the day of their wedding also indicates her

yearning for a serious romantic relationship and her vulnerability as a woman (CH 224).

But a fuller picture of Alex is only revealed when Fairstein depicts Alex's feelings towards her two homes, a New York apartment and a house at Martha's Vineyard. While the city affords more liberty for women like Alex, there is an obvious tension between work and family life caused by the frenetic pace of activity demanded by contemporary urban living. New York City, as represented by Fairstein, nurtures businesses and careers and becomes the battlefield for professional competitions. This can be seen in the way in which Alex's New York apartment is represented, in contrast to her home at Martha's Vineyard. The apartment Alex has in New York does not convey any normal sense of home at all. Rather, it is described as a place where Alex's professional life is extended and often overrides her personal life:

The answering machine kicked in after a fourth irritating echo from the insistent caller. I listened to my recorded voice announce that I was not available to come to the phone right now, as little hammers pounded furiously inside my head. The last Dewar's of the evening had been unnecessary. I cocked an eye to glance at the illuminated dial flowing an eerie shade of green in the still dark room. It read 5:38 A.M. [...] The reason I paid the ridiculously high rent I did each month was for the security of a luxury building. Someone was obviously trying to put a scare into me. He was succeeding (*LTD* 9, 202).

A cold blast hit me as I opened my apartment door. Thank God I had forgotten to turn down the air conditioner. The coolness felt good as I moved into the bedroom to take off my wilted suit (*CH* 19).

Alex's New York home does not leave any impression of a cozy place to comfort the busy professional woman. Nor does it offer a complete respite from the danger, trouble or urgency that her job entails. An enforced sense of temporal awareness, an impersonal arrangement of electronic appliances as represented by the answering machine, and the negligence Alex shows to her

New York apartment: these all indicate that her New York home is an extension of her office and her professional life rather than a space for personal security and tranquility.

Such a description of her New York apartment differs greatly from the way in which apartments are represented in the novels of McInerney and Ellis. In *Bright Lights*, for instance, the anonymous protagonist has a complicated feeling towards his New York apartment on West Twelfth Street. For him, his apartment is a place where he can relax and indulge himself with “a little Mozart” and “a cup of cocoa”. He even claims that “[a] man’s home, after all, is his castle” (36). But at the same time, the apartment is the place that reminds him of Amanda, his wife who has abandoned him for a photographer. McInerney’s careful description of the protagonist’s ambivalent feelings towards his apartment reveals the collapsing of family tradition as a result of intensified urbanization and New York’s cultural transition—from a culture that emphasizes substance and depth to one that accentuates surface. Patrick’s New York department in Ellis’s *American Psycho*, on the other hand, is depicted in a completely different way. It is decorated with a “white marble and granite gas-log fireplace”, “a six-foot-by-four-foot portrait of a naked woman” and “a long white down-filled sofa and a thirty-inch digital TV set from Toshiba” (23-24). The representation of Patrick’s New York apartment rehearses Ellis’s emphasis on a culture preoccupied with brands and materialism. It enhances his central motif and serves to satirize the increasingly depthless culture of 1980s New York.

By comparison, Alex’s lack of emotional attachment to her New York apartment in *Cold Hit* reveals the tension between her professional and

personal life, as a result of the intense competition and fast tempo demanded by living in New York City. Among all these details, the protagonist's acute awareness of time indicates the temporal framework through which urban living is organized. Although it is the nature of Alex's job to be constantly called to urgent situations, Fairstein's references to the intimidating temporal commitment demanded by her profession reveals the crucial features of an urban experience where fast-paced life and pressing schedules are the norm. In contrast, her home at Martha's Vineyard is shown entirely differently:

This was the place that I considered my home. Professionally, I thrived and flourished in the fast-paced life I lead in New York City. [...] But this island, especially the quiet rural end on which my house was sited, was where I came to relax and to restore the tranquillity that eluded me in the midst of an intense investigation (*CH* 223).

The description of Alex's home in Martha's Vineyard poses a sharp contrast to her New York apartment. The emotion the narrator invests here is more personal to the character of Alex and more acutely expressed than elsewhere in the novel. By showing the spiritually regenerating effects of her Martha's Vineyard home, the narrator seems to suggest that New York City cannot play any constructive role in offering tranquility or relaxation to an individual. It is also indicated here that the difference between these two homes is caused mainly by the impact of the fast-paced lifestyle in New York. In depicting Alex's life in Martha's Vineyard, that is, outside New York City, Fairstein thus provides an important comparative perspective through which Alex can be fully developed through this alternative space that nurtures her emotional growth.

This contrast in the pace of Alex's life is taken further in the discrepancy Fairstein establishes between the descriptions of Alex's romantic experiences

as encountered at these two homes. In *Likely to Die*, Alex takes Drew Renaud to her New York apartment after they meet at Joan's dinner party. But the romantic night ends merely with kissing before Drew leaves her apartment (195). Drew eventually withdraws from the relationship at the end of the story.

By contrast, when Alex takes her boyfriend Jacob Tyler to her home at Martha's Vineyard, they consummate their relationship and develop further physical intimacy (*CH* 230). At Martha's Vineyard, Alex takes Jacob to a beautiful stretch of the beach she purchased when she bought the house and they swim naked together (*CH* 228). When the story ends, Alex and Jacob's relationship flourishes and their love suggests a future development. But what is also worth noting is that Alex takes the initiative in creating the romantic atmosphere in her love life when she resides at her home at Martha's Vineyard. She even attempts to buy ready meals from the market to "prepare" a home-made meal for Jacob (226).

It is highly symbolic that this differentiation between the performance of Alex's romantic relationships with these two men at her different homes yields different outcomes. By showing that Alex's home at Martha's Vineyard is the place where her personal life can grow, Fairstein strengthens her previous narrative message that New York City nurtures and perhaps privileges professional development whilst simultaneously depriving individuals of emotional development. It is only through alternating her geographical location and retreating from New York that Alex's feminine self grows and her love life develops.

The way in which Alex's love life develops also reveals important information concerning the author's feminist claims. It provides a window

through which we can investigate the crucial gender role played out by the protagonist in the novel. Reddy's parameters for thinking about gender roles remain pertinent to my evaluation at this point:

If, as I asserted earlier, the family has traditionally been women's primary reality and the locus of oppression, then all legal improvements in women's status mean very little without a fundamental reimagining and reordering of women's position within the family and within other "personal" relationships (106).

Alex's private life thus reveals that "women's position within the family and within other 'personal' relationships" is changing. Traditional behaviours that are often associated with women have changed. Alex is degendered not only in terms of her professional role but also in terms of her family role. More importantly, such feminist indications are not established on the premise of totally depleting the character's inner feminine yearnings, but are fostered through allowing her feminine self to grow when Alex relocates to a different place (Martha's Vineyard). This makes Alex a more believable character since Fairstein forges her to be a female detective character who keeps a balanced professional and personal life.

However, what restricts Alex from being more representative of American women in general is her identity as a well-educated, middle-class, white professional woman. She only exemplifies a limited number of socially and economically privileged women in American society. Sally Munt's observation of female detective protagonists in 1970s and 1980s American literature suggests that the female detective protagonist is "[t]ypically white, professional, middle class, often holding a Ph.D. from a well-known university, [and that] this intellectual has integrated liberal feminism into her texts as political discourse" (33). Building on that, Schoenfeld claims that female

detective characters are not only “middle class but the authors are as well...these women writers write for a specific segment of the population—namely educated women” (838). Although female American detective fiction has developed robustly in the last two decades and both author-groups and reader-groups are more diversified than before, Munt’s and Schoenfeld’s observations have a ring of truth when considered in relation to Fairstein’s novels. While one might argue that through her representation of female victims and suspects, particularly in her subplots, Fairstein has tried to incorporate a wider range of individuals in terms of ethnic groups and social backgrounds, the main characters of her novels are still confined to elite, white professional women in New York City. The consciousness of Alex as an emotionally and economically independent woman, for instance, is not a feature that is shared by the majority of American women who continue to live in predominantly patriarchal influences in America.

In addition to using a female investigator to deliver her feminist claims, Fairstein’s focus on sex crimes also allows her to intensify her feminist politics. Although the theme of sex crime is more likely to be a choice informed by Fairstein’s professional exposure to criminal cases of this nature in real life—given her work as a prosecutor for sexual offences—this thematic focus complies well with the provocative feminist claims conveyed through the representation of the changing status of rape victims.

According to Fairstein, Alex’s female sensibility seems to be an advantage in her investigation of sex crimes. Compared with her two male sidekicks, Alex can often see what is overlooked by them and find the key to piecing together crucial pieces of information. She is consistently the character responsible for

unravelling the mystery and discovering the culprit, rather than Mike or Mercer. In Gemma Dogen's case (*Likely to Die*), for example, her curiosity in Gemma's personal life and hobbies leads Alex to uncover a vital file tab labeled as "MET GAMES" (*LTD* 338) which, as it turns out, has nothing to do with American baseball. It is a detailed record of Coleman Harper's medical misconducts. This finally reveals Coleman's incentive for killing Gemma. Alex's outstanding performances at work reaffirm Fairstein's previous message that women exceed men in New York City.

The representation of sex crimes in Fairstein's novels is also conducive to revealing the changing status of women in New York. The description of these social transformations and their impact upon gender relations is not confined to the main storylines in the two novels. There are several minor storylines that also focus on sex assaults. In one instance, a Dominican woman is molested by a witch doctor who she pays to console her after her husband's death (*LTD* 40). In another case, Josie Malendez, a victim of a sex assault, survives the violence and subsequently assists the police by offering a sketch of the culprit (*CH* 242). In yet another case, an unexpected molestation is delivered to a housewife in a high-end apartment where the victim "paid six hundred fifty-three dollars for the privilege of being abused by a member of the staff" (*CH* 370). And, most bizarrely, a notorious case involves a female patient being raped by an anesthesiologist who "resedated her with a horse tranquilizer after she came out of surgery for a foot injury" (*LTD* 64). These subplots extend the author's representation of a broad range of characters in order to articulate the diverse ethnic makeup of New York's inhabitants. To a certain degree, these minor female characters compensate for Fairstein's focus on

white middle-class women as her main characters. But such a representation also achieves a certain didactic purpose on the part of the author. It demonstrates the changing legal procedures and the variety of sex assaults carried out in New York. The insider's point of view furnished by Fairstein's narrator further fulfills this didactic purpose when she reveals the city's changing attitudes towards sex crimes:

So much had changed in this business, just in my professional lifetime. Women, who had traditionally been reluctant to report cases of sexual violence, were now far more likely to come forward, as society lifted the age-old stigma on victims who cried rape, and began placing the blame where it belonged: on the offender (*CH* 240).

This straightforward message about the changing societal perception of women and of sex crimes afforded by women's ascending social status, reaffirms the confidence within the protagonist's voice with regard to her gender role. Sex crimes have long been regarded as stigmatic. Women are not only victims of sex violence. They are also further victimized by the stigmatic perceptions surrounding rapes and sex crimes upheld by society. The misunderstanding and hostility towards female victims make it difficult to bring sex offenders to justice. The insider's point of view that Alex provides here offers an index to the changes regarding sex crime cases and sex crime laws in 1990s New York. This affirms the changing social status of women and their increasing equality with relation to men in the city.

The didactic project of educating women about sex crimes and sex offence laws is deeply embedded in Fairstein's writing and underpins her entire Alexander Cooper series. Prior to her fictional writing career, Fairstein was approached by a publisher to write non-fiction in order to educate people about the criminal justice system and, in particular, about rape and sexual violence

law (Dengler). For Fairstein, her novels are an extension of this education since she has personally been part of the changing legal system as well as improvements in the technologies employed to increase sex crime convictions. According to Dengler, Fairstein was “one of the very first people in the nation to learn to use DNA evidence, a term she hadn’t even heard of until 1986”. In a sense, her novels become the perfect vehicle to inform her readers of the changes taking place with respect to sex crime laws and technologies. In this sense, Susan Reed considers Fairstein’s novels to be “aimed at urging sex crime victims to come forward”. Such an interpretation suggests that Fairstein’s writing career closely correlates with her career as a legal investigator. Moreover, her writing is imbued with a responsibility that has defined her career as an investigator. In reality, the author’s commitment to community service and to literacy programs also evidences her efforts in disseminating her expert knowledge regarding sex laws within her community.

While urban crimes, especially sex offences, arouse great anxiety and insecurity on the part of Alex, the way in which Alex’s life is organized within an urban context provides the central clue to understanding her insecurity. Alex’s vulnerability and weakness is fully revealed through the representation of a series of assassinations plotted against her. The sleepless nights Alex has to spend after witnessing various crime scenes and the extra rent she pays to enjoy the security of her expensive Upper East Side apartment are indications of the challenges her job entails. Even the unknown causes behind the sex crimes Alex investigates are symbolic of the hidden nature of urban danger. As Alex explains, sex offences are often initiated by acquaintances rather than strangers:

“Most people don’t realize that almost eighty percent of reported rapes occur between people who know each other.” [...] “So, while violent street crime is way down, the acquaintance-rape victims aren’t at all affected by the presence of the cop on the beat. They trust their assailant—so they walk right past the officer into the apartment or dorm or hotel room of the man they’re with—and then the attack occurs.” (*LTD* 174)

The notion of urban safety as represented by police statistics is again in question here as familiarity breeds an illusory sense of safety that disguises sex offenders, therefore misleading the victim’s assessment of danger. This undermining of statistics concerning urban safety in New York is not merely part of Fairstein’s ongoing efforts to educate her readers about sex crime laws, but also serves as a vital example to demonstrate how a constructed sense of urban safety can be fabricated and can mislead people. What is suggested here is that unlike certain social crimes which can be temporarily repressed by the presence of community policemen (such as gangster violence and petty theft), the nature of sex offences is different and is often more concealed. This makes it difficult to prevent the crime, or allow a third-party to interfere with the criminal process. By suggesting that increasing police presence on the street fails to reduce sex crime, Fairstein has actually conducted a critique of the aggressive policing strategies represented earlier in the novel. Through Alex’s analysis of the unique nature of sex crimes at this juncture, the author thus demonstrates the necessity of redoubling our efforts in searching for the deeper sociological and personal causes of sex crimes.

However, in contrast to her more straightforward message concerning women’s elevated social status through the representation of professionally prominent women characters, Fairstein has retained great caution in offering any tentative conclusions about the incentives that motivate sex crimes. When

the author explains the causes of sex crimes in an interview, she argues that “[w]e still don’t understand the complicated pathologies that cause men to rape, and until we do, we need to help and protect the victims [...] they need to know the system will work for them” (Fairstein, interview by Reed). Although the individual causes behind each sex crime are varied and cannot easily be understood, Fairstein’s choice of using sex crimes as the basis for her narratives does encourage the reader to reflect upon the social and cultural contexts that lead to sex crimes. In fact, there are scattered descriptions throughout Fairstein’s novels to indicate the latent connection between contemporary culture and sex crimes. In one instance, Mike has listed all of Alex’s favourite movies, including *Rebecca*, *Notorious*, *Gaslight* and *Dial M for Murder* which, according to Mike, all contain some kind of “spousal abuse” or “domestic violence” (CH 57). In another case, a junkie is arrested for public lewdness (LTD 156).

The influence of the mass media and the aftermath of the drug epidemic in New York in the 1970s and 1980s are latent cultural contexts that lie behind the crimes represented by Fairstein. The significance of cultural context becomes more persuasive when Fairstein’s novels are read comparatively with the fictions of McInerney, Ellis and Bushnell. A shared feature of these authors’ representations of New York is the city’s cultural changes. New York’s culture is depicted as increasingly dependent upon commodification to the point that some of the harmful aspects of subcultures have entered into mainstream representations and exert their impact on a wider group of individuals. The violence and sexual predation disseminated via the increasingly commodified mass media is a point that is ridiculed in Ellis’s novel. And an increasingly

sexualized urban space is also critiqued by Bushnell. The fact American culture has been increasingly exposed to sexualized images and pornography via mass media is a claim made by the authors of *The Porning of America* (2008). Sociological studies have established the link between sex crimes and increased cultural exposure to pornography through mass media. Neil Malamuth's study has also suggested that "there was existence of reliable associations between frequent pornography use and sexually aggressive behaviors, particularly for violent pornography and/or for men at high risk for sexual aggression" (qtd. in Reid). Rory Reid believes that at least "it is safe to say that people who consume pornography, specifically violent pornography, place themselves at risk of engaging in inappropriate and unhealthy behaviors." Robert Peters also shares their views and claims that "there is already enough evidence of a causal link between pornography and sex crimes [...]" (34). A more pertinent observation has been made in *The Porning of America*. Kevin Scott and Carmine Sarracino argue that porn has seeped into, and been absorbed by, every aspect of American culture: language, entertainment, fashion, advertising, sexual behavior, and even politics (1-10). The general public's increasing exposure to a culture that is filled with violence and sex makes it extremely difficult to curb sex crimes at a merely administrative level.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, the commodification of sex and sexual images in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American culture must share the blame for the deviation of individual behaviours. Although Fairstein does not offer any hasty conclusions concerning the cultural impact of sex crimes in her novels, her description of pervert sex criminal cases and her observation of the hidden nature of sex crimes enhance the impression

of cultural deviation accentuated in Ellis's and McInerney's novels. Fairstein's choice of sex crimes as the key theme of her novels, in this light, is pertinent to revealing the symptoms of the changing culture of 1990s New York City.

With her female investigator and female victims, Fairstein's novels have made a contribution to female detective fiction in America. By situating her protagonists in the changing criminal and legal landscape of 1990s New York, her Alexandra Cooper series offers a useful contribution to deepening readers' understanding of New York, New York women and of detective fiction in general. Her representation of professionally prominent women does justice to the rising status of women in the city in reality. It echoes the rise of women's social status as a positive consequence of urbanization in America. Alexandra Cooper becomes the author's surrogate to deliver her particular feminist ideology and politics. New York City, as the role of Alex reveals, offers equal if not more favourable conditions for women to compete with men. However, the fact that Alex only represents well-educated middle-class white American women prevents the author from pushing her feminist claims further. Fairstein fails to bring a wider group of American female characters into the central focus of her representations. This indicates that the relationship between the genre and women is still a vulnerable one. Fairstein's experimentation with the genre is also limited by Alex's identity as a legal attorney (although she investigates and confronts criminals), instead of a police detective. This, to some extent, suggests that detective fiction still has a distinctive masculine apparatus in terms of the gender of the detective.

When compared with Qiu's Inspector Chen books, it seems that Qiu has been bolder in terms of experimenting with the genre. Qiu's adaptation of a

typically Western genre has, in the first place, evidenced the experimentations he has exercised upon this foreign genre. However, Inspector Chen is less of a believable character than Alex in the sense that he has incorporated a taste and intellectuality that are based less on reality than on a narrative strategy that caters for the interest and curiosity of the Western reader. Qiu is conscious of his readership and as a result his transnational identity has a clear impact on the construction of Inspector Chen. However, it is precisely Qiu's transnational identity that facilitates him in seeing Shanghai and its social crimes in a more objective manner. By forging Chen as an anti-hero whose personality entails features of both Western and Chinese cultures, Qiu has made him a surrogate for transitional Shanghai. Qiu's anticipation that the city can embrace greater openness, as well as his concerns for those deep-rooted traditions that hinder its openness, is encapsulated in the ambivalent personality of Inspector Chen. Moreover, Qiu's detective fictions are still dominated by male characters. Although Pei Qin, Detective Yu's wife, often aids Chen and Yu's investigation with pivotal suggestions and analyses, she is not credited with a detective identity. The way in which Qiu privileges his male characters as the only characters credited with the identity of detectives at the expense of Pei Qin who is limited to her role as a housewife indicates the masculine bias in his novels. This offers little revelation concerning the changing status of women, which is better spelled out by Wei Hui through her protagonists.

Conclusion

By focusing on Fairstein's representation of the Caxton Due art gallery in *Cold*

Hit and the Mid-Manhattan Medical Center in *Likely to Die*, this chapter shows that Fairstein's temporal and spatial perspectives are vital to understanding urban crime in New York City. Her representation of certain urban locations pinpoints a socially divided New York City where the underclass are criminalized and victimized throughout history. By exploring the histories of these urban locations, Fairstein reveals a multi-layered historical reality and unpacks the connection between institutional crime and individual crime in a capitalist social system. Her perception of time and space deepens the socio-political message entailed in Fairstein's representation of her crime sites, which resonates well with Qiu's deployment of urban spaces in his representation of Shanghai.

The female investigator, Alexandra Cooper, is an important contribution to the female detective genre by Fairstein. Alex is depicted as a successful New York woman whose professional life does not undercut her personal life. Alex's balanced profile is achieved through contrasting her two homes in New York and Martha's Vineyard. Her professional prosperity in New York City and the growth of her personal life in her home at Martha's Vineyard show that Alex is a financially and emotionally independent woman who takes full control of her life. Alex's independence makes her an important agent to deliver the author's overt feminist claims. She also provides a unique female perspective into sex crimes and New York City. Alex shares the author's responsibility to educate the reader about the city's changing sex crime laws and its public perceptions of female victims. Such an embedded didactic purpose can be perceived through the author's continuous efforts to spell out in her novels the changes regarding the legal system and its treatment of sex crime laws in New York

City.

It is worth remembering that Fairstein's Manhattan in *Likely to Die* and *Cold Hit* is one that is subject to changing policing strategies in the 1990s. This was a time when precipitated urban expansion and gentrification gave way to administrative fine-tuning. During this period, the city of New York and the country as a whole were experiencing progressive economic changes established on a democratic capitalist system. Key social issues were being resolved through successive legislative and governmental strategies underlined by democratic policy-making. It is in this context that social crime was regarded as manageable at an administrative level. Less concern was given to the deeper social causes of crime. Therefore, Fairstein's representation of New York allows a socio-historical perspective to pursue the institutional cause of crime. Although the way in which New York is depicted in Fairstein's novels differs greatly from the novels of Ellis, McInerney or Bushnell, there are certain characteristics that connect their depictions to suggest that New York in the 1980s and 1990s was underpinned by intensified commodification and a rising media culture.

This drastically differentiates Fairstein's representation of New York from Qiu's and Wei's Shanghai. In both Qiu's and Wei's novels, Shanghai is represented as a city undergoing dramatic socio-economic transformations following the country's open-door policy. The city is represented as confronted with a series of mismatches and discrepancies in governmental policies. Qiu's representation accentuates the lingering impact of the Cultural Revolution on the city's current socio-economic reform. The historical perspective he heavily relies upon in his depiction of various crime sites sheds light on the price

individuals have to pay in order to cope with policy inconsistencies as well as the city's drastic changes. His adaptation of a Western literary genre in English shows the impact of Western civilization on Chinese culture in the contemporary period. Qiu's transnational identity allows him to fully utilize this genre to share his observations regarding Shanghai and deliver his socio-political messages. As a foreign genre that entails the scientific and democratic inspirations of Western civilization, the development of the detective genre symbolizes the modernization process of Chinese culture. Therefore, Qiu's appropriation of the detective genre in line with Chinese stories demonstrates a sense of the integration of Western civilization into Chinese culture. His Inspector Chen books also become an index to show the tendencies of Chinese literature and Chinese modernization as a whole.

The evolutionary history of crime fiction can in itself be an index to reflect social changes too. In Fairstein's case, her transformation of the predominantly male detective protagonist familiar to detective fiction to the appearance of a well-educated middle-class white female investigator reveals the ascending status of New York women, albeit privileging certain women over others. As Carolyn Heilbrun argues: "Women detectives forge for themselves the chances for women to enter the world of men's work. [...] it demonstrates how women may achieve an autonomy at least as great as that available to men". With the wide ensemble of female characters in her novels, Fairstein pushes the boundaries of the subgenre by demonstrating professionally prominent women characters. They, in turn, promote Fairstein's own overt feminist claims.

Conclusion

As an ongoing global progress, urbanization cannot be discussed in isolation. In this dissertation I have sought to bring into the discussion two cities which exemplify heightened forms of urbanization, and an approach through literary representation. I have sought to demonstrate that close analysis of literary texts is as important an approach as sociological and historical studies if we want to interpret urbanization, its manifestations, and its impact on culture. This dissertation has, in particular, examined the topics of commodification and crime through a select number of novels about New York and Shanghai. These topics not only form the underlying themes through which the discussion has been organized; they are also concepts which crucially underpin the literary themes, forms, narratives, characters, production and genres relevant to these works. At the same time, these ideas are connected back to urban theories in the hope that they will provoke other studies of these two world cities.

Commodification has been the central idea to link together Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) and *Story of My Life* (1988), Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1996), Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (1999) and *Marrying Buddha* (2005), and Wang Anyi's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (1996) in the first part of this dissertation. These novels reveal how the experiences of individuals and their relationships have been nurtured and changed by the processes of commodification in a modern urban environment in both New York and Shanghai. Although these authors interpret commodification from different angles, with different emphases, and to varying degrees, the investigation of

commodification in both formal and thematic terms within these novels helps to unpack the relationship between recent literary texts and the city. Through close textual analysis it is apparent that excessive commodification has become a thematic and formal feature in New York writing of the 1980s, as covered in the first chapter. The formal features of these novels, in the first place, reveal the proliferation of commodification in literary creation. Surface becomes a revealing notion through which to understand the commodification of form and themes, whether it is understood as signifying the commodified narrative “surface” most typically represented by a litany of brand names in Ellis’s novel, or interpreted as indicating the thematic emphasis on images and superficial relationships in Bushnell’s and Wei’s novels.

In Ellis’s novel, highly commodified language which forms an outpouring of brand names is an intentional mockery of the material excess and media proliferation that plagued New York’s cultural life in the 1980s. This is also a feature that has been identified in Bushnell’s and Wei’s novels, although their writing is not as linguistically commodified as Ellis’s. In contrast to Ellis, McNerney accentuates the sense of materialism and its effects upon human relationships in New York’s urban environment through certain narrative and linguistic strategies. The second person narrative in *Bright Lights*, and the present tense which is dominant in *Story of My Life*, capture the tension of an urban experience and highlight the tendency towards increasingly superficial relationships. This depiction of objectified human relationships in New York is more apparent in Bushnell’s writing. *Sex and the City*, in particular, demonstrates how a preoccupation with surfaces has become dominant in the cultural life of New York City. The way in which images work to influence the

aesthetic, professional, and lifestyle choices of the characters in her novel suggests that superficiality has become a staple quality of New York cultural life. It also becomes the crucial ingredient in defining romantic and sexual relationships. Bushnell sharply reveals the tendency of shallow sexual relationships through mapping out the sexual politics of New York City. The sense that anything can be bought in New York City makes the concept of commodification pertinent in linking these authors together.

Although thematic and formal commodification is also a feature of Wei's and Wang's Shanghai novels, they are approached from a different angle. In their novels, it is the commodification of the subject matter as well as the marketing of their novels that make them comparable to the New York novels discussed above. However, the way in which Wei's characters experience consumer culture reveals that Shanghai has begun to embrace global consumerism less with scepticism than enthusiasm. Themes like commodity fetishism, indulgent materialistic lifestyles, drug addiction, and random sex occur in Wei Hui's novels. But Wei's characters are intoxicated by Western consumer culture and take pride in living a Westernized lifestyle in 1990s Shanghai. This sense of genuine worship of global consumer culture in Wei's novels distinguishes her from those New York writers, and Shanghai from New York.

Notably in these Shanghai novels, both Wei and Wang commodify Old Shanghai heavily as a theme. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, there has been a tendency to capitalize on, commodify, and appropriate the stories and images of Old Shanghai in the 1990s. Interestingly in Wang's case, her intention to critique the over-commodification of Old Shanghai stories, has

been interpreted by most readers as an effort to echo that trend. In Wei's case, the media hype surrounding the publication and banning of *Shanghai Baby* reveals the strength of market forces in commodifying literary works at the time of Shanghai's economic transition. The case of *Shanghai Baby*'s ban resonates well with the way in which *American Psycho* was commodified, vilified and censored in the American market. The fact that banning itself has become a marketing strategy to further commodify literary works reveals the impact of consumerism on literary production in both cities in the contemporary period.

Yet one important difference that distinguishes the representation of Shanghai from New York is an emphasis on the city's colonial history by Shanghai writers. The juxtaposition of Western and Eastern influences is apparent in both Wang's and Wei's novels. The epitaphs Wei uses in her novels as well as the transliterated words that appear in both Wei's and Wang's novels indicate that Shanghai's unique *Haipai* culture has been, and continues to be, forged under the dual influences of Western and Chinese cultures. In comparison, New York City's colonial history can hardly be discerned in these New York novels. This suggests that the colonial tradition has been incorporated into New York's cultural fabric and becomes an inherent content of what defines the city today.

In the second part of this dissertation, crime formed the central idea through which to compare Qiu Xiaolong's and Linda Fairstein's novels. Both writers choose the detective genre to tell the stories of their respective cities. This made the relationship between the detective genre and the city my primary concern in this part. Having already given a brief overview of the connection

between genre and the city in the thesis Introduction, I explore the development of the detective genre in China, and the central position of Shanghai writers, past and present, in introducing and appropriating this typical Western genre as a way to modernize China. Qiu's choice of the detective genre is part of a continuous effort to further this cultural borrowing and process of modernization.

Two of Qiu Xiaolong's Inspector Chen series, *When Red is Black* (2004) and *Red Mandarin Dress* (2008), and two of Linda Fairstein's Prosecutor Alexandra Cooper series, *Likely to Die* (1997) and *Cold Hit* (1999), were analyzed comparatively to understand the connection of individual crime and state/institutional crime. The detailed account of Shanghai's geographical changes through the description of various crime sites by Qiu reveals Shanghai's recent social transformations. It also provides important clues to the cultural, historical and political dimensions of the city. Qiu's strategy of using the detective framework to disguise his political messages complicates the implications of his novels. It allows the reader to associate the city's current crime with its historical crimes, and individual crime with state crime. The investigation of crime therefore facilitates Qiu's investigation of the country's erased history, the Cultural Revolution. In this way, Qiu challenges a kind of deliberate collective amnesia.

Fairstein's novels provide a historical perspective on the city, too. The representation of crime sites allows the author to introduce New York's social history. This complicates her interpretation of the city's current crimes. An implicit connection between its historical crimes and current crime can be detected through Fairstein's deployment of time and space. Her representation

of the crime site gives a clear indication of the institutional crime that is inherited and passed down to individuals in the contemporary period.

The temporal and spatial perspective shared by both authors in representing the crime site allows theories surrounding “TimeSpace” to inform my interpretation. What has proved to be particularly useful is an investigation of the spatial and temporal perspectives of these two authors. Their explorations of the histories of their respective cities put into perspective the connection between historical and current crimes. Qiu’s texts provoke a reinvestigation of China’s Cultural Revolution. By doing so, the author reiterates those state crimes in history that must share the blame for the city’s current crimes carried out by individuals. Fairstein’s exploration of New York’s history leads the reader to see the effects of a capitalist system that has caused its past crimes and is still the fundamental cause of its current crimes. What distinguishes the two authors is that Qiu’s representation of crime reveals the deep political and economic conflicts embedded in China’s process of modernization, while Fairstein’s representation of crime leads directly to an economically, racially, and culturally divided city, whose divisions result from an inequality of social, political and cultural resources as a result of its long-established capitalist social system.

The apparently similar themes of these New York and Shanghai novels are underpinned by great disparities between the political regimes and cultural fabrics within the two cities. New York’s political democracy and capitalist free-market economy are the principal causes of its yuppie greed, as manifested in the excessive commodification and surface-oriented value system in 1980s and 1990s New York culture. The urban crime of New York, therefore, is

situated within a social context at the centre of which is the inequality caused by capitalist system. Shanghai, on the other hand, has undergone a transformation from a planned to a market economy. What lies beneath such a dramatic transformation is a loss of traditional value systems and conflicts between different ideologies, beliefs and social systems. The novels of Wei Hui, Wang Anyi and Qiu Xiaolong all echo this sense of disorientation in their own ways. While Wei and Wang accentuate a sense of materialism that begins to take the place of China's traditional value system, Qiu accentuates the problematic aspects of such social transitions. The multi-layered histories of Shanghai, first as a capitalist semi-colonial city and then a communist city and now as a capitalist city again can be evidenced through investigating the similarities and differences between the representations of the city by these different authors.

This dissertation has thus compared particular New York and Shanghai novels because of their shared focus on commodification, crime and the city. The implications of such a comparison are multiple. First, the shared themes and similarities between them suggest that there is a cross-pollination between Eastern and Western literature. Wei Hui's representation of Shanghai is a good example of the impact of global consumerism and Western popular culture on the younger generation of Chinese people in the contemporary period. Wei's protagonists' curiosity and eagerness to embrace global consumerism and Western culture are symptomatic of a global system which is dominated by Western, and particularly American, culture. This strengthens the impression that the world we are living in today is increasingly Westernized, or more specifically, Americanized. Although it is easy to claim that Western cultural

imperialism has informed a shifting and transforming Chinese literary scene, it would be too simplistic to overlook the mutual cultural impact in this global perspective. To suggest that China's contemporary culture and literature are merely passive receptors of Western popular culture and global consumerism is to neglect its contribution to complicating and enriching the global cultural scene through, predominantly, transnational writers. Qiu Xiaolong's novels are a fine example to demonstrate how elements of traditional Chinese culture can infiltrate American literature and contribute to a traditionally Western literary genre. The success of his Inspector Chen books in the American market is also suggestive of the capacity of American literature to embrace cultural diversity. The fact that the American literary scene is continuously enriched and transformed by writers from different ethnic backgrounds suggests that cultural imperialism is a more nuanced concept than it is broadly believed to be.

The second implication of my comparison shows that while there are similar social issues within the two cities' processes of urbanization which have had a clear impact on their literary works, the underlying causes of these social issues are not entirely the same. The representation of the social gaps between rich and poor, the increasingly commodified urban culture, the aesthetic emphasis on surface, and the moral degradation and spiritual void of the yuppies in the New York texts, reveal an urban environment that articulates increasing social isolation. Class divisions and inequalities are replaced by inequalities existing among different professional, racial, community, age and gender groups. And the choices made in relation to consumption patterns, lifestyles, aesthetics and professions by the characters in McInerney's, Ellis's and Bushnell's novels, in particular, reveal the inflections of excessive

commodification whose deep-rooted causes can still be explained by the institutional flaws of capitalism. The Shanghai texts, on the other hand, reveal emerging Chinese *nouveau riches* in a formerly egalitarian city. In these texts, social divisions between the rich and poor widen in proportion with the city's rapid economic growth, becoming a prominent social issue that shifts the traditional values and endangers urban stability and safety. The sense of disorientation discerned among the protagonists in Wei Hui's novels, the blind commodification that features the marketization of both Wei's and Wang Anyi's novels and the aggregated social crimes revealed through Qiu Xiaolong's novels all indicate the symptoms of the growing social gaps between rich and poor. These texts show that while introducing capitalism to Shanghai again triggers the collective memory of the city's semi-colonial history and begs questions to the legitimacy of the Cultural Revolution, the leap to capitalism and swift urbanization in a short span of time reveal the inconsistency of the government ideologies and the mismatch between the economic and political structures that problematically lie at the centre of Shanghai's (and China's) socio-economic transformation. The symptoms and tension of such economic and political gaps have apparently entered into the literary works investigated in this dissertation and form the unique post-socialist dilemma that China is confronted with in its modernization and postmodernization programme.

By organizing these texts according to a discussion of commodification and crime, this dissertation has conducted focused analyses and comparisons of specific aspects of urbanization whose impact on the city, its residents, and its literature can be felt through looking closely at literary themes, forms,

characters, genres and productions. However, these comparisons have hardly exhausted the multi-faceted influences of urbanization. This dissertation, confined as it is, serves as an initial step towards future comparative literary research on these two world metropolises.

Appendix 1

Email with Qiu Xiaolong. 30 June 2009.

Hi jiaying:

It's a bit more than that if you compare the ending of the English and Chinese in
Death of a Red Heroine.

Thanks and best,

Xiaolong

--- On Tue, 6/30/09, CM4all-WebsiteCreator <noreply@cgi-wsc.chi.us.siteprotect.com> wrote:

From: CM4all-WebsiteCreator <noreply@cgi-wsc.chi.us.siteprotect.com>
Subject: Contact Qiu Xiaolong
To: qiuxiaolong@qiuxiaolong.com
Date: Tuesday, June 30, 2009, 6:20 PM

Message - 06/30/2009 at 18:20:02
E-Mail: jiayingc@hotmail.com
Last Name: Cai
First Name: Jiaying
Contact: no

Comment:
Dear Qiu *Laoshi*,¹⁰⁵

Is it fair to say that the Chinese translations of your works haven't changed the major contents of your novels apart from the denomination of the city and some direct references of the government?

¹⁰⁵ *Laoshi* means teacher in Chinese. It is a respectful way to address anyone older and more knowledgeable than yourself, according to Chinese custom.

Appendix 2

Telephone Interview with Cao Zhengwen. 30 July 2009.

Telephone Conversation Transcript

Cai Jiaying—J, Cao Zhengwen—Z

J: Hello, Cao *Laoshi*.

Z: Hello.

J: I'm Cai Jiaying, if you still recall the email I sent you last week. I am doing a PhD in the University of Nottingham in the U.K..

Z: Yes. I remember. I have emailed you back.

J: Yes. I have received your reply. Thank you very much for letting me call you on the phone. I am really flattered that I can talk to you now. I have realized that your penname is Mi Shu. I used to see your (pen) name so often on *Xin Min Evening News* and I liked reading your column when I was in high school.

Z: You are welcome. So you are doing a research project on detective fiction, right?

J: Yes. I am looking at Shanghai detective fiction right now. But unfortunately, there aren't many Shanghai writers who write in this particular genre. I focus on the past three decades but so far I haven't found many publications of detective fiction in that period. You are one of the few Shanghai writers who are working in this genre. Do you happen to know any other Shanghai writers who write detective fiction too?

Z: I am very interested in the genre. I used to write *Wu Xia* fiction. But in the 1980s I began to work on this genre. I know Lan Ma, i.e. Ma Ming, is working in this genre too. Do you know him? He wrote the Detective Sangchu series.

J: Yes. I have heard of him. But he is focusing on Beijing, right? Cao *Laoshi*, I am wondering whether all your novels are based on Shanghai. If so, why didn't you specify the city and some of the street names you used in your novels?

Z: Yes. All my novels are based on Shanghai. And all the stories are based on real criminal cases. As a matter of fact, the crime rate of Shanghai since the 1980s has been rising and it has reached a staggering number. For example, my story in *Shadow of Qiu Xiang Villa* was based on a rape case. The perpetrator was the son of the Minister of Publicity in the Shanghai Municipal Government at that time. In the 1980s, he gathered a few friends in his villa and seduced many women there and then they raped them. This case caused a great sensation then. Of course when I wrote it, I added in my own imagination and exaggeration. But that story is by and large based on that criminal case. Because of the political sensitivity of similar cases, not all of them are reported. Therefore writing them down in the form of fiction becomes my way of reporting them to my readers. As to the city and street names, this is a unique phenomenon in China because of an inherited ideological control. Once you write something, the facts become fiction and they are not realities any more.

J: I notice this is a prevalent phenomenon in all crime fiction, or indeed, all fiction in China. Does that mean that you need to conduct a process of self-censorship before you publish your work?

Z: You know our country is a socialist country. For the government, in a socialist state, there shouldn't be any crime. So it is impossible to write any crime fiction based on realities although it is a social fact that the crime rate has been rising since the 1980s.

J: I see. Thank you very much. Cao *Laoshi*, I really want to read some of your early books, like *Amorous Thief*, *Maze at Buddha Island*, *Golden Trap* and *Shadow of Qiu Xiang Villa*. But unfortunately I can't buy them from the market any more. I have checked Amazon.com and Joyo.com but they are either sold out or not available. The only book of yours that is available on these online bookstores is your recent publication, *Red House Labyrinth*. Is there any other way I can get those earlier books?

Z: I guess it is because these books were published in the 1980s. But they were later all collected in one book called: *Dushi Yi'an (Disputed Cases in the City)*. I happen to have an extra copy at home, if you want.

J: Really? That's fantastic. Can I borrow it? If so, it will be great. You are really helpful. I am sorry that I can't express my appreciation in person. But I will surely do so once I come back to Shanghai. Because I am in the U.K. now, I can't personally come and collect the book. Can I ask a friend to get in touch with you later? That will be great if I can read your book now.

Z: Sure. You can ask your friend to call me. Now you have all my numbers.

J: Thank you so much. I will call you again to let you know my friend's name. Can I let my friend know your numbers so that she can call and discuss a date and time to come and collect the book?

Z: No problem. Let her call me.

J. Thank you very much again. It's such an honour to talk to you. Take care and I shall call you soon.

Z: You are welcome. Bye-bye.

J. Bye-bye.

Glossary

Pinyin	Chinese	English
An Boshun	安波舜	
Bian Zhiling	卞之琳	
<i>biluo huangquan</i>	碧落黄泉	from heaven to hell
<i>bu</i>	补	
Cao Zhengwen	曹正文	
Cao Xueqin	曹雪芹	
<i>Chang Heng Ge</i>	《长恨歌》	<i>The Song of Everlasting Sorrow</i>
Chen Danyan	陈丹燕	
Chen Kaige	陈凯歌	
Chen Sihe	陈思和	
Chen Zhiqiang	陈志强	
Cheng Naishan	程乃珊	
Cheng Xiaoqing	程小青	
Deng Xiaoping	邓小平	
<i>donghu lu</i>	东湖路	Donghu Road
Du Yueshen	杜月笙	
<i>Duoqing de Qiezei</i>	《多情的窃贼》	<i>Amorous Thief</i>
<i>Dushi Yi'an</i>	《都市疑案》	<i>Disputed Cases in the City</i>
<i>Fengyue</i>	《风月》	<i>Temptress Moon</i>
<i>Fuo Dao Mizong</i>	《佛岛迷踪》	<i>Maze at Buddha Island</i>
Gan Chenyan	干琛艳	
<i>gong'an</i>	公安	Public Security
<i>gongfu</i>	功夫	<i>kungfu</i>
<i>gonggong zujie</i>	公共租界	The International
Settlement		
Gu Guoyong	傅国涌	
<i>guanxi</i>	关系	personal network
<i>Hai Shang JiuWen</i>	《海上旧闻》	
<i>Haipai Wenhua</i>	海派文化	<i>Haipai Culture</i>
<i>Hong Lou Meng</i>	《红楼梦》	<i>Dream of the Red</i>
<i>Chamber</i>		
<i>hong weibing</i>	红卫兵	the Red Guard
<i>Hongfangzi Migong</i>	《红房子迷宫》	<i>Red House Labyrinth</i>
<i>huaihai lu</i>	淮海路	Huaihai Road
<i>Huang He Lou</i>	《黄鹤楼》	<i>The Yellow Crane Pagoda</i>
<i>huangpu qu</i>	黄浦区	Huangpu District
Huang Shuqin	黄蜀芹	
<i>Huayang Nianhua</i>	《花样年华》	<i>In the Mood for Love</i>
<i>hukou</i>	户口	Household Registration
<i>huoqi xiaoqiang</i>	祸起萧墙	hatching a catastrophe

Pinyin	Chinese	English
Jiang Jieshi/Chiang Kai-shek	蒋介石	
<i>Jingpai Wenhua</i>	京派文化	<i>Jingpai Culture</i>
<i>Jinrongjia</i>	《金融家》	<i>The Banker</i>
<i>Jinse de Xianjing</i>	《金色的陷阱》	<i>Golden Trap</i>
<i>kangri zhanzheng</i>	抗日战争	the Anti-Japanese War
<i>Kuomintang</i>	国民党	the Chinese Nationalist Party
<i>Lan Wu</i>	《蓝屋》	<i>Blue House</i>
<i>laodong mofan</i>	劳动模范	model worker
<i>lao shanghai</i>	老上海	Old Shanghai
Li Tiangang	李天纲	
Lin Yutang	林语堂	
Liu Hong	刘红	
<i>longtang</i>	弄堂	
Ma Shanglong	马尚龙	
Mao Zedong	毛泽东	
<i>maodun jiang</i>	茅盾奖	Mao Dun Prize
<i>meinǚ zuojia</i>	美女作家	beauty writers
Mian Mian	棉棉	
<i>nanjing lu</i>	南京路	Nanjing Road
<i>neizhan</i>	内战	the (Chinese) Civil War
<i>Niezhai</i>	《孽债》	<i>Sinful Debts</i>
Peng Xiaolian	彭小莲	
<i>pidou</i>	批斗	mass-criticism
<i>pudong</i>	浦东	Pudong
<i>putuo shan</i>	普陀山	Putuo Mountain
<i>puxi</i>	浦西	Puxi
<i>qin shi huangdi</i>	秦始皇帝	Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi
<i>qipao</i>	旗袍	the Mandarin Dress/qi dress
Qiu Xiaolong	裘小龙	
<i>Qiuxiang Bieshu de Yinying</i>	《秋香别墅的阴影》	<i>Shadow of Qiu Xiang Villa</i>
<i>Shanghai Baobei</i>	《上海宝贝》	<i>Shanghai Baby</i>
<i>Shanghai de Hongyan yishi</i>	《上海的红颜遗事》	<i>Shanghai Beauty</i>
<i>Shanghai de Fenghua xueyue</i>	《上海的风花雪月》	<i>Shanghai Memorabilia</i>
<i>Shanghai de Jinzhi yuye</i>	《上海的金枝玉叶》	<i>Shanghai Princess</i>
<i>Shanghai Jishi</i>	《上海纪事》	<i>Shanghai Chronicle</i>
Shanghai 1933 lao changfang	上海 1933 老场坊	1933 Arts and Creative Hubs
Shao Yanjun	邵燕君	
<i>shenti xiezu</i>	身体写作	body writing
Shenzhen	深圳	
<i>shikumen</i>	石库门	
<i>shimin wenhua</i>	市民文化	plebian culture
<i>shimin xushi</i>	市民叙事	civic narrative
Shunde	顺德	

Pinyin	Chinese	English
<i>Siheyuan</i>	四合院	
<i>Sishisui Nanren de Kunhuo taiji</i>	《四十岁男人的困惑》	<i>Dilemma of Men in Their Forties</i>
<i>huangpu jiang</i>	黄浦江	<i>tai chi</i>
<i>tian'anmen guangchang</i>	天安门广场	The Huangpu River
<i>tingzijian</i>	亭子间	Tiananmen Square
<i>waitan</i>	外滩	The Bund
<i>waitan gongyuan</i>	外滩公园	The Bund Park
Wang Anyi	王安忆	
Wang David Der-wei	王德威	
Wang Jiawei/Wang Kar-wai	王家卫	
Wei Hui	卫慧	
<i>wenhua da geming</i>	文化大革命	The Cultural Revolution
<i>Wo De Chan</i>	《我的禅》	<i>Marrying Buddha</i>
<i>Wusi Yundong</i>	五·四运动	The May Fourth Movement
<i>xiao/yao rou mian</i>	肴肉面	<i>xiao</i> pork noodles
<i>xinmin wanbao</i>	新民晚报	<i>Xin Min Evening News</i>
<i>Xin Tian Di</i>	新天地	
Xu Ying	徐颖	
Xu Zhimo	徐志摩	
<i>Yao 'a'yao, Yaodao Waipoqiao</i>	《摇啊摇，摇到外婆桥》	<i>Shanghai Triad</i>
<i>yangjingbang</i>	洋泾浜	Pidgin English
<i>yangqi</i>	洋气	Westernized style
Yu Qiuyu	余秋雨	
Zhang Ailing	张爱玲	
Zhang Xudong	张旭东	
Zhang Yimou	张艺谋	
<i>zhonghua renmin gonghe guo</i>	中华人民共和国	The People's Republic of China
Zhongshan	中山	
<i>zhongyi</i>	中医	Traditional Chinese Medicine
Zhu Guodong	朱国栋	
Zhuhai	珠海	
<i>Zise de Youhuo</i>	《紫色的诱惑》	<i>Purple Seduction</i>
1930s Shanghai fengqing jie	1930s 上海风情街	1930s Shanghai Fengqing Street

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